University of Alberta

LITERACY FOR ELDERLY URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

BY

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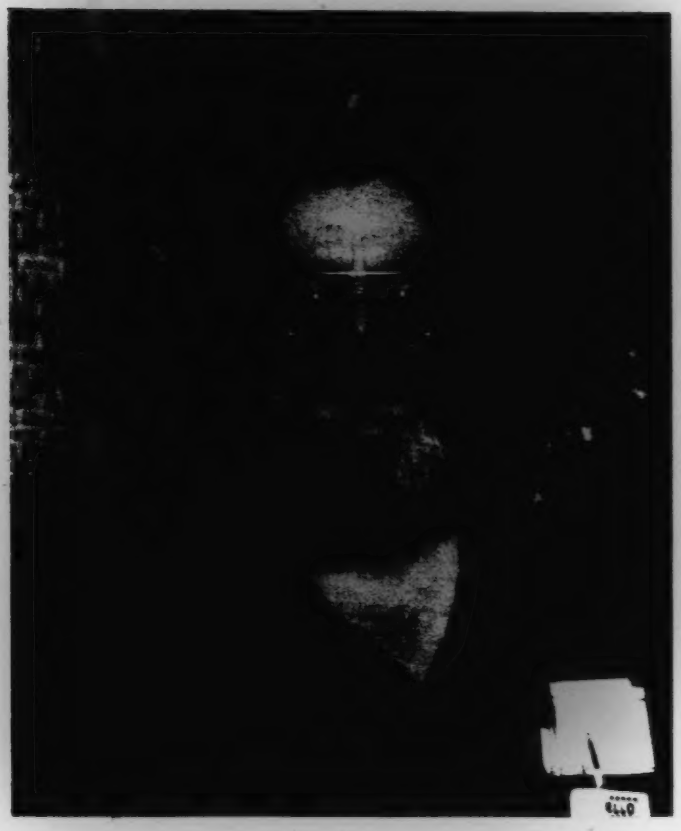
DEDICATION

Robert John Turner

1948 - 1999

Scholar, mentor and a very good friend



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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

I had been walking Mother Earth's domain for four decades without experiencing the effects of illiteracy[1] and aging when I came face-to-face with illiteracy and aging in a most personal way.

> There was an Aboriginal man I knew well who, then in his early sixties, had been working at a steel fabricating company for many years. Having acquired all the necessary manual operating skills, he was offered the job of foreman. He had very limited literacy skills and could only write his name. He had to turn down the opportunity as reading blueprints and construction documents were well beyond his limited literacy skills.
>
> Twenty years later, the man and his wife were caretakers of a small apartment building. They had lived there for about ten years and the man, and his wife, had done all the caretaker tasks well. One day he was informed that the apartment was sold and the new owner's manager told the man that he and his wife were to be evicted immediately from their basement apartment.
>
> All his life the man had, with his manual labouring skills, supported his wife and son through many difficult and good years. At the age of seventy-five eviction from his job and his apartment was too much for him to comprehend. He broke down and cried. He did not know what to do. He did not know his rights. He was, for the first time in his life, unable to use his labouring skills to solve this problem.[2]

---

[1] In this study illiteracy refers to persons who have difficulty in decoding and comprehending written English, "that is, the ability to look at written (English) words corresponding to ordinary oral discourse, to say them, and to understand them" (Kaestle, 1985, p. 13).

[2] It would dishonour my father's memory if I were to leave the reader with the impression that he was weak in the face of a problem. He began his working life by leaving his home at the age of twelve years, circa 1910, and as he said, "I put my foot to the rail". The meaning of which, at that time was, if you did the work of a man then you drank as a man with the men. In World War I he was critically wounded in the lower abdomen by German machine gun fire. He was left

I was that man's son and that was my initiation into the world of illiteracy and aging. On reflection this was the incident that, recalled some years later, provided the impetus for my interest in literacy for elderly urban Aboriginal people.

Their situation has been lost midst the attention directed towards the situation of the general Aboriginal population. "The literature shows that little research has been conducted to specifically define the unique problems and needs of the Native elderly" (Saskatchewan Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, 1988, p. 7).

Elderly Aboriginal people are, often, the most vulnerable of the Aboriginal population and those who live in urban settings are "more likely to be poor, less healthy, and less able to access needed services than their counterparts in the general seniors

---

outside the front line medical centre (front line triage) as not medically salvageable. He, obviously survived. What I know of this incident came, not from my father, but through an accidental conversation with one of his former World War I comrades.

Let me relate several incidents that demonstrate my father's coping skills: my father, in his early sixties at the time, went to visit a close friend and upon entering his friend's house he was confronted by a young man pointing a shotgun at him. The friend lay on the floor, having just been killed by the shotgun wielding man. With only his cane in hand my father faced the man down forcing him to run out of the house. My father did not tell my mother of the incident, she learned about the incident in the next day's newspaper.

In his mid-sixties, following the bankruptcy of his place of labour, he and another man went out on contract work cutting, with acetylene equipment, scrapped farm machinery for a pipeline manufacturing company. The scrap machinery, often found in remote farmers' fields, required them to camp at some sites until the scrap machinery was cut into manageable sizes. Sometimes they had to burn off tall grasses that were entangled with the scrap machinery. On this one occasion some of the gasoline splashed on my father's hands and when it was ignited his hands were severely burned. His partner urged him to go for medical help but my father said they should do the job first. Three days later, after completing the work, he went to a doctor and was immediately admitted to hospital with second and third degree burns to his hands. Once again the revelation of this incident had to come from his working partner.

These are but three examples in my father's life that show he was no "cry-baby". However, even old warriors may lose a skirmish.

population" (Saskatchewan Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, Supplement, 1989, p. 1).

Exacerbating their situations are increases in, and acceleration of, social, economic and technological advances that place greater emphasis on younger groups contributing to "a permanent structure of unequal social exchange" (McClusky, 1970b, p. 1; McPherson, 1983, p. 150; Myles & Boyd, 1982, p. 281). Many elderly Aboriginal people, on the extreme end of this unequal social exchange, have become isolated; isolation and unequal social exchange erode their margin of socio-economic internal and external resources.

It has shown to be difficult to determine with any accuracy, the number of elderly Aboriginal people residing in large urban centres; Armstrong-Esther, Brown and Buchignani (1997) and the Saskatchewan Senior Citizens' Provincial Council Study (1988) findings indicate that the Aboriginal urban population has been continually underestimated. A primary reason for this underestimation, in particular elderly urban dwelling Aboriginal people, is that many do not consider their move to their urban setting as permanent. Even though they may have resided in an urban setting for most of their adult life many continue to list their primary residence as their reserve. The number of elderly Aboriginal people in the urban setting in which this study was conducted was, according to Canada's 2001 census data, about

5500, representing approximately 9 percent of the urban setting's total Aboriginal population (Canada, 2001).

Two studies, the Saskatchewan Senior Citizens' Provincial Council (1988) Study of the unmet needs of off-Reserve Indian and Metis elderly in Saskatchewan and Hohn's 1986 Issues affecting older Natives in Alberta: A discussion paper, have stated that without the ability to read English many elderly Aboriginal people miss out on available health and social service programmes. Moreover, there are a significant number of elderly Aboriginal people who, living alone, have limited English reading skills, education and family support. Living under such conditions many of them fail to respond to official letters that may contain information that might be financially or socially beneficial for them (Armstrong-Esther, et al., 1997, pp. 38-39; LEEP, 1986a, p. 4). Their limited reading English skills may delay or impede their accessing timely and relevant social assistance, socialisation, and self-advocacy.

Debates in the arena of adult literacy range from the need for the empowerment position of Freire (1993) to the urban Aboriginal social networking described by Fingeret (1983). Such debates on the continuing evolution of adult education tend to focus the direction of adult literacy towards either academic or economic fields. These debates rarely give consideration to the one group who are most often left out of adult literacy, older persons. And, within this older population,

there are those who are not only left out of the adult literacy debates but are very nearly forgotten, elderly urban Aboriginal people.

Adult literacy may not, as UNESCO studies have found, "necessarily lead to improved economic conditions" (Sticht, 1988, p. 78). On the other hand, the shift from a primarily oral communication to a literacy base could, for many elderly Aboriginal people, afford them access to new learning experiences; new experiences that could supplement, encourage and heighten their personal view of their urban world. A literacy process that introduces elderly urban Aboriginal people, living alone or with limited family support, to a culturally sensitive literacy experience was the aim of this study.

The Research Questions

Many of today's elderly urban Aboriginal people are of the "done to" generation that resisted enforced schooling; "as a consequence, as late as 1951, eight out of every twenty Indians[3] in Canada over the age of five ... possessed no formal schooling" (Barman, J., Hébert, Y. & McCaskill, D., 1986, p. 10). A critical aspect of this study then was the need to ensure that it was a "done with" and "done for" study that served the interests of elderly urban Aboriginal participants. With that in mind, the goal of the study was, with their

[3] At one time, the term "Indian" was an acceptable nomenclature for Indigenous peoples of Canada. It was/is a political term given by the Federal Government - however, as self-government, education, awareness, and thus empowerment impact on Aboriginal peoples, the preferred term is either Aboriginal, or more widely accepted , "Indigenous peoples."

participation, a look at how elderly Aboriginal participants approached learning. The vehicle for the examination of their learning approach was a phonics based learn-to-read-English process. The following questions guided my study.

1. Of the elderly urban Aboriginal people who agreed to participate in this study:
   a. what were their educational backgrounds?
   b. how was respect for the participants incorporated in this study?
2. What were the motivations of the elderly urban Aboriginal participants:
   a. who participated in the learn-to-read-English process?
   b. of those who expressed an interest in this learn-to-read-English process, but did not participate, why did they not participate?
3. How well, in the views of elderly urban Aboriginal participants, had the following literacy components stimulated their interests:
   a. the "visual" component?
   b. the "experiential" component?
4. What were the views expressed by the elderly urban Aboriginal participants as related to:
   a. their experiences with this study?
   b. their perceived level of reading achievement within the study's prescribed time?

Significance of the Study

Elderly urban Aboriginal literacy learners do not fit within the mainstream adult literacy realm within which adult literacy students are usually defined as those between 18 to 45 years of age. Adults in the latter age group are expected, once they acquire an appropriate level of literacy learning, to return to the work force (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, pp. 75,86). Among this group of adult students, there are those who may have had their higher education interrupted because of family concerns, work or personal pressures; they are most "likely to be very focused in their pursuit of a career" that enhances their role in society (Peterson, 1986, p. 39). Among illiterate older mainstream and Aboriginal people, some may see themselves as outsiders, disengaged by reason of their age from the educational, political and economic roles of their mainstream urban society.

Age does not mean that all illiterate older persons do, or should, disengage from their urban society. There are illiterate elderly Aboriginal people who, using their urban life experiences, reach out and assist those less fortunate than themselves. And, there are those who just quietly withdraw into their own personal areas of interest. However, there are illiterate elderly Aboriginal people who, lacking mobility by reason of physical and/or financial constraints, close family or friends, may be left on the margins of their urban society.

Reaching out to and given the opportunity there are illiterate elderly Aboriginal people who would engage in a literacy approach if they found it would be done with them as well as being, on their terms, done for them.

Findings from this study may, hopefully, extend literacy educators' and tutors' understanding and awareness of the need to establish a learning approach that engenders a relationship of trust and respect between themselves and their elderly urban Aboriginal people literacy learners.

Even though literacy programmes are conducted in culturally neutral educational settings such as public or private institutions, literacy is not a "neutral technology that can be separated from specific social contexts" (Street, 1984, p. 1). With many elderly Aboriginal people having been raised in an Aboriginal environment, subjecting them to mainstream literacy approaches often fails to integrate the indigenous "knowledge they already have and [to] respect" their culture (Freire, 1991, p. 7). To be effective and accepted by elderly Aboriginal people literacy, even for the isolated or marginalized, requires that it be accessible, culturally appropriate and respectful of their lived experiences. A culturally appropriate learning approach for elderly Aboriginal people may be answered, in part, through an exposition of a social philosophy and an appropriate and practical literacy presentation.

Delimitations

Elderly Aboriginal people are, for purposes of this study, deemed to be a male or female person claiming Aboriginal ancestry, 55 years of age or over whose primary residence is in an urban area. The selection of the age 55 is currently seen as having an equivalency to age 65 for non-Aboriginal people as a reflection of the general agreement that the life expectancy for Aboriginal people was, in 1981, "9.5 years less for men and 10.1 years less for women" (Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, 1994, p. 17, fn. 21; Saskatchewan Senior Citizen's Provincial Council, 1988, p. 15). Armstrong-Esther et al. (1997) study found that,

> for example, many Native people in their 50s show levels of ill-health and disability more typically associated with non-Aboriginal people in their mid-70s. Moreover, degenerative diseases commonly associated with old age are much more likely to affect Native people earlier and with greater intensity. (p. 40)

There were two delimiting conditions that I imposed on my study;

a. the elderly urban Aboriginal people who involved themselves in my study were treated as co-researchers and were given appropriate recognition in accordance with their individual directions, and,

b. the study was to be conducted in a culturally appropriate manner and location in accordance with the wishes of the elderly urban Aboriginal participants.

Assumptions

I made an assumption that some elderly urban Aboriginal people, even though they may have extensive "social networks that ... offer access to most of" their required needs and "see themselves as interdependents" (Fingeret, 1983, pp. 133-134), would participate in an appropriately presented literacy process. Several interdependent elderly urban Aboriginal people were persuaded, through family and friends as intermediaries, to contribute their time, skills and knowledge to this study.

Limitations - Self as Researcher

My experience with literacy was as an English as a Second Language (ESL) volunteer tutor. My time as an ESL volunteer influenced, in part, my Masters study (1997), Elderly urban Natives and survival literacy in which I recommended the development of a "literacy programme for elderly urban Natives that is both relevant and culturally acceptable" (p. 115).

I am not a reading specialist and lack expertise in diagnosis and remediation of readers. However, I wanted to look at the issue of how elderly urban Aboriginal people related to, and, approached literacy learning.

Generalizability of the findings from this study is limited to the small population comprising this study sample.

Definitions

This research project enters into an area that has not been extensively studied, elderly urban Aboriginal people and

literacy. Therefore it is necessary to begin with the definitions used in this research project as follows:

Aboriginal for purposes of this research study refers to all members of Aboriginal groups in North America; however, the term is sometimes used interchangeably with Native, Amerindians, North American Indian, Métis, Inuit and all persons who claim Aboriginal ancestry.

Culture of a society or of a subgroup within a society develops when a group shares a way of life at the same time and place. Culture provides a symbolic order and set of shared meanings to social life, and is composed of nonmaterial and material elements. The nonmaterial elements include norms, customs, values, beliefs, knowledge, morals and sanctions. These are symbolically represented through material elements or artefacts such as laws, language, art, dress, folklore, technology, literature, music, art, ceremonies, and games (McPherson, 1983, p. 37).

Urban Setting for purposes of this research, is a city of 100,000 persons or more.

Urban Population for purposes of this study refers to all persons living in an urban centre of over 100,000 persons.

Urban Aboriginal is a male or female person claiming Aboriginal ancestry whose primary residence is deemed to be in an urban centre of over 100,000 persons.

Elderly, in the mainstream culture, "people of age," are often referred to as "senior citizens" or "older" persons while the term "elderly" is seen as a derogatory term implying, for some, a diminution of mental and physical faculties. In Aboriginal communities the term elderly is considered to be a respectful term, almost of endearment, bestowed on family members whose years entitle them to pass on their experiences and values to their family members. Many elderly Aboriginal people have an active role within their own family and are often asked to share their experiences with their community (Wilson, 1996, p. 3). For this study, it means people of at least 55 years of age.

Elderly Urban Aboriginal is a male or female person claiming Aboriginal ancestry, 55 years of age or over, whose primary residence is deemed to be in an urban area.

Mainstream, for purposes of this study, refers to the most active, productive and dominant off-reserve economic and employment markets that are usually associated with the competitive urban settings.

Mainstream elderly, male and female, for the purposes of this study are a collectivity whose social and fiscal origins relate to the social exchange characteristics of mainstream dynamics.

Elder, as used in Aboriginal communities, has been, and is currently the subject of discussion under the oft-asked question,

"who is an Elder?" In this study the term is capitalised so as to distinguish such persons as specific persons embodying certain qualities desired and recognised by Aboriginal societies.

Literacy as defined by Cervero (1985) is "the ability of individuals to function within a specific social context" (p. 3). In this study, the specific social context is the English language.

Phonics is usually referred to as a method of teaching reading by associating letters with their acoustic sounds; "the sound-symbol relationships between the small, usually non-meaning-bearing, parts of words" (Ekwall, 1976, p. 53).

Outline of the Study

Chapter 2 describes and examines educational philosophies related to literacy for adults, older mainstream persons and Aboriginal learners. Chapter 3 outlines the design of the study, description of the learn-to-read-English material and technical support used in the study. Chapter 4 introduces the study's elderly urban Aboriginal participants, describes the need to respect the elderly participants, and their actions with, and interactions to, the study's literacy process. Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the learning approaches suggested by the study's findings. Chapter 6 contains a summary of the study, findings, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further study.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concern for the importance of life long learning has been amply identified in the writings of Brookfield (1987), Street (1984), Knowles (1980), Bergevin (1967) and others. Today there are opportunities afforded older mainstream and elderly urban Aboriginal people to pursue interests in a variety of educational niches from rediscovering hand crafts to attending university. In order to participate in the majority of such activities elderly Aboriginal people require one very necessary requirement; being literate in Canada's dominant language, English.

This literature review focuses on several educational philosophical considerations relative to the orientations of adult, older mainstream and Aboriginal persons. The continuity of experience that grounds Aboriginal education is examined. An exposition of a social philosophy for elderly urban Aboriginal literacy is followed by Scribner's (1986) literacy approaches.

> *Philosophy* is an ambiguous term that has both popular and technical terms. It denotes systems of thought, the academic study of thought, and also particular techniques of study and analysis. It also suggests a concern for questions and problems that are "behind" the empirical or experienced world. (Lawson, 1991, p. 284, italics in the original)

Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education

Adult education has a long history moving from religious and moral instruction to an emphasis on the needs of the adult learner. For Thomas Pole (1816/1968), mainstream adult education then, was "a most cheering prospect in our view . . . to teach persons to read the Holy Scriptures; and that all persons, of both sexes, . . . shall be admitted by the conductors according to their discretion, and dismissed by them as they think proper" (pp. 1, 107). Cranage's (1920) view of mainstream adult education was "to produce and sustain the healthy mind in the healthy body. . . . Life will be infinitely richer for it, sympathy will be quickened, selfishness will shrink, false pride will be subdued" (p. 34). Masterman (1920) saw mainstream adult education as being grounded "on the twin foundations of high moral idealism and alert political intelligence" (p. 110).

Lindeman (1926/1961) and Knowles (1962) moved mainstream adult education from moral highground positions to ones that valued the adult learner's needs within a changing society. Lindeman (1926/1961) saw the necessity for a curriculum "built around the student's needs and interests. . . . [for] those who aim to alter their conduct in relation to a changing environment in which they are conscious of being active agents" (pp. 6, 50). Knowles' (1962) vision was one that "in a totally educative community everybody would be always

partly a teacher and partly a learner, the highest social approval would be reserved for those activities and those persons concerned with improving the quality of human competence" (p. 279). Verner's (1964) view of mainstream adult education, on the other hand, sees the needs of adult learners as irrelevant. In his version of mainstream adult education an educational agent would select, arrange, and continuously direct "a sequence of progressive tasks that [would] provide systematic experiences to achieve learning for those whose participation in such activities is subsidiary and supplemental to a primary productive role in society" (p. 32).

There are a number of Western philosophical orientations that have had, and still have, an impact on adult education such as: positivism, analytic philosophy and pragmatism. Positivism, in the form of behaviourism, taught students through "rote memorisation and repetitive drills aimed at the development of physical skills" (Selman & Dampier, 1991, p. 28). Analytical philosophy promotes traditional Western academic disciplines over the interests of the students. Pragmatic philosophy advances the notion that students should receive education that incorporates student interests and experiences. A brief overview of a number of education philosophers, Lindeman, Bergevin, Brookfield and Knowles, indicates that there has been, and is, an interplay of these three philosophical orientations in adult education.

Lindeman, a friend and admirer of John Dewey wrote, in 1929, that adult education was, at the time, based on the unsuitable orthodoxy of lecturing, listening and memorisation. Lindeman, with a pragmatist bent, stated that those who knew the meaning of progressive education realised that adult education "must begin with experience, not subjects" (Brookfield, 1987, p. 33). Lindeman's view of the teacher-student relationship was one that should be "mutual, personal, informal. The teacher learns while he teaches . . . [the] teacher will be he who lives with his learners, shares their aspirations and their defeats, and is prepared to learn with them" (pp. 37, 42). Lindeman saw education as an agent for social change in company with an increasing concern of students for themselves and others. However, Brookfield notes that Lindeman, in his 1933 essay Social education, exhibited "a faith in the potential of social science to lay bare, in a somewhat positivist manner, the essential conditions for a good society" (p. 217). Lindeman's philosophical approach to education intersects pragmatism and positivism.

Paul Bergevin (1967) appears to take on one of the forms of analytical philosophy. Analytical philosophy consists of several variants one of which is conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis adherents "go beyond the analytical process to make normative (what should or ought to be done) proposals about what education should be like" (Long, 1983, p. 303).

Bergevin's (1967) beliefs/assumptions can be grouped into three categories, personal change, intellectual growth and community responsibility (pp. 5, 6). Within Bergevin's conceptual framework there is found his pragmatism whereby the "adult learner should have something to say about some of the forces that shape him. He should help set the goals of the learning program" (p. 135). And, as with Lindeman, Bergevin's emphasis is on having the educator "be acquainted with the learner and . . . bring the learner into a meaningful relationship with what is to be learned" (p. 95). The learner must, in Bergevin's view, actively participate in, and appropriate, some of the responsibility for the success (and failure?) of the educational activity (p. 56).

Knowles is regarded as the spokesperson for andragogy as "he has been mainly responsible for its popularization" (Jarvis, 1995, p. 90). Andragogy is Knowles' basic philosophy in the sense that it highlights and confirms his emphasis on the development of the individual without reference to changing the social structure (Long, 1987, pp. 28, 40). His philosophy is based on six assumptions in his andragogical model: the need to know; the learner's self-concept; the role of the learner's experience; readiness to learn; orientation to learning; and motivation. An essential ingredient in Knowles' philosophy is his emphasis on the educator "doing everything possible to help

the learners take increasing responsibility for their own learning" (Knowles, 1990, p. 64).

The philosophies of adult education are, at one and the same time, reconstructive and conservative. The conservative philosophy of adult education is one of means, "how to do it" with a limited reconstruction aroma of "why do it." If adult education is seen as minimally reconstructive and generally more conservative, then the philosophies of education for older persons is most often one of denial and an abridgement of their accumulated wisdom and life experiences.

Philosophical Settings for Older Mainstream People's Education

There are some voices, Lawson (1991), Moody (1985), Long (1983) and McClusky (1970b), that promote philosophies of education for older people that, in a liberal democracy, propose older people's entitlement to equality of access to education resources.

Four mainstream educational philosophies label older people and their position in society: rejection, liberal, activity and achievement. These labels have been generated by evolving socio-economic forces and influenced in part by society's political philosophies (Lawson, 1991, p. 289).

The rejectionist label describes older persons as parasitic and, lacking the productive capabilities of younger member of society, as enfeebled "competitors for scarce goods and

resources" (Long, 1983, p. 114). The rejectionist label is most often, but not always, found in a society "which shapes education according to the interests of those who have the power" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 35). The 1970s saw education for older persons expand rapidly and, if it "looked promising then, it is positively brilliant now" (Manheimer, Snodgrass, & Moskow-McKenzie, 1995, p. 1). However, in many of today's contemporary societies the rejection of the value of older persons continues to be replaced by a disproportionate emphasis on the young. Too often an older person's education is opposed by those whose cry is "let the other fellow take care of himself; that's what I have to do" (Bergevin, 1967, p. 36).

The liberal label is one by which political activists and welfare advocates view education for older persons as a means of entertainment. Education as entertainment has only one purpose, to keep older persons busy in order to reduce the pressure on other more expensive services (Long, 1983, p. 114). This attitude of education as entertainment can be said to be "structured dependence" promoted and encouraged by advocates for the elderly. However, in times of economic and fiscal restraint older persons' "education as entertainment" is subject to withdrawal (Robertson, 1991, p. 146).

The activity label is based on merchantry. Advocates promote the notion that older persons value life and "that evidence of the value of life is at least in part related to

activity" (Long, 1983, p. 115). Education for the older persons is seen as a means to keep him/her in, what activity advocates call, life's mainstream. Activity advocates promote education for older persons as the way for them to develop and prepare "for second careers" (p. 115)! What activity advocates misdiagnose is the reality of the lives of many older persons; they may very well have many other commitments which do not include the notion of a second career.

The achievement label is an extension of the activity philosophy (Long, 1983, p. 115). However, many older persons may feel, or have such a mind-set, that there is less opportunity and less time to achieve new educational goals. These feelings, more often than not, have the older person turning inward and contemplating the end of life rather than giving consideration to what new accomplishments might possibly be reached. Yet, for some older persons achievement is an appropriate element of later life, one in which they believe they have the "capacity to do what they set out to do" (Atchley, 1999, p. 111). Older persons who embrace achievement and seeks complementary education may find that learning assists them "to live a better life, help [their] fellow man," and extend their personal horizons (Bergevin, 1967, p. 97).

McClusky's Philosophy for Older People's Education

Advocating for moving older learners from mainstream adult education was the task that McClusky (1970b) felt "should have a much higher priority in the programs of the educational enterprises than it now has" (p. 10). McClusky viewed older mainstream persons' education as having a "significant and potentially powerful role to play" provided there were other means that would support them to "cope with threats to their survival and autonomy as well as insults to their integrity" (p. 8).

For McClusky (1970a) aging was a series of commitments, or critical periods in one's growth that led to "an accumulation of obligations" embracing an ever growing variety of concerns and attachments "to work, property, civic affairs, and especially the extended family" (p. 84). In later years a reduction in commitments and obligations would allow the "potential for continuing learning and inquiry" (p. 91). McClusky proposed, in 1963, his concept of Margin[4] as an approach to understanding the dynamics of adult learning.

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[4] McClusky (1970a) explains his theory of Margin as "a function of the relationship of Load to Power... By load we mean the demands made on a person by self and society. By Power we mean the resources, i.e. abilities, possessions, position, allies, etc., which a person can command in coping with Load. Margin may be increased by reducing Load or increasing Power, or it may be decreased by increasing Load and/or reducing Power. We can control both by modifying either Power or Load. When Load continually matches or exceeds Power, and if both are fixed and/or out of control, or irreversible, the situation becomes highly vulnerable and susceptible to breakdown. If, however, Load and Power can be controlled, and better yet, if a person is able to lay hold of a reserve (Margin) of Power, he is better equipped to meet unforeseen emergencies, is better positioned to take risks, can engage in exploratory, creative activities, is more likely to learn etc., i.e. do those things that enable him to live above a plateau of mere subsistence" (p. 82).

In McClusky's concept "Margin is a function of the relationship of Load to Power" based on the premise that adulthood is a time of "growth, change, and integration in which one seeks balance between the amount of energy needed and the amount available" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, pp. 279-280). Load is the value of internal and external life demands while Power consists of ameliorating internal abilities and external supports with Margin as the reserve energy available for meeting unforeseen or personal enhancements. The energy resource, Power, is what individuals are left with after meeting their needs and responsibilities, Load. Throughout an individual's physical and mental growth, various roles and responsibilities are accumulated and relinquished; Load and Power are adjusted in concert with such adjustments. Thus, a necessary condition for learning "is access to and/or the activation of a Margin of Power that may be available for application to the processes which the learning situation requires" (McClusky, 1970a, p. 83). However, McClusky's concept of Margin did not "address learning itself but rather *when* it is most likely to occur" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 282, italics in the original).

McClusky (1970b) advocated that older persons' educational programmes had to encompass five types of needs:

> 1. Coping needs-that is, acquiring skills that are required for functioning in society. These skills can be in the area of basic education (reading, writing and computing), physical fitness, economic self-sufficiency, housing, family relationships, or the use of leisure time.

2. Expressive needs-engaging in activities for the enjoyment inherent in the activity itself.

3. Contributive needs-participating in activities in order to give, to be of service to others.

4. Influence needs-exerting influence, becoming an agent of social change.

5. Transcendence needs-achieving a sense of fulfilment, being able to rise above the limitations of declining physical powers (McClusky, 1974 quoted in Merriam & Lumsden, 1985, pp. 59-60).

Moody (1985) contends that transferring these needs to a learning process is problematic as McClusky's needs for older learners are also modes of learning that can "be applied to all adult learning" (p. 36). And, it is not clear if McClusky meant his needs categories to be applied to all older persons regardless of their socio-economic status. There is not, even today, sufficient research into age-related preferential educational strategies for assisting older persons to learn (Bolton, 1990, p. 138).

Another educational category that has to be considered is the learner's life experiences. Moody (1990), in teaching older persons, would defer to their life experiences and "not be so much concerned to convey new knowledge or information as to elicit a new understanding of what is already present in the learners" (p. 30). Older person's life experiences, however, give rise to embedded opinions and in a learning environment their "opinions will be challenged at the same time as they are taken seriously" (p. 31).

As with adult education, older persons' education "cannot generate new thinking only from within" the realms of educators (Lawson, 1991, p. 297). The most influential ideas about older persons' education may be those drawn from older persons themselves; older persons' educational processes cannot develop, and evolve, without reference to them. Older persons' education has to be a part of the culture of aging feeding upon outside ideas. Feeding upon ideas from without could, for older persons' education, answer the question, "what constitutes learning and knowing in old age?" (Moody, 1985, pp. 37, 38).

The philosophy of education for older persons should not categorise older persons; it should not regard them as burdens on society nor as persons in need of entertainment. Furthermore, education for older persons needs to be considered as an indispensable "principal component" of later life, designed to meet the needs of all elderly persons, and not be just a "decorative option" (McClusky, 1970b, p. 5).

The voices of Lawson (1991), Moody (1985) and McClusky (1970b) promote a philosophy of education for older mainstream persons, a philosophy that, in a liberal democracy, proposes that older mainstream persons' entitlement to equality of access to educational resources and to the sharing of their accumulated knowledge is their right. Aboriginal education, by contrast, has always been one of inclusion; culturally, learning is a sharing of

accumulated wisdom and experiences throughout the life of all community members, young and old.

Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal education has, as with Aboriginal identity, passed through "a secondary enculturational process" (Medicine, 1995, p. 45). Even so, Aboriginal education maintains its continuity, its interconnectedness, affirming that its roots are governed and influenced by the natural rhythms of community and environment. Natural rhythms are experiences, interactions that are contiguous with the life of one's community and individuals therein. Aboriginal cultures are "high context cultures" wherein Aboriginal people are bonded "to each other . . . [through] rhythms that are *culture-specific* and expressed through language and body movement" (Hall, 1976, pp. 39, 74, italics in the original).

In Aboriginal cultures the learning process is one of cultural preservation and renewal, transmitting and fostering arts, skills and knowledge, through the rearing of the young and in the teaching of adults. Underlying Aboriginal learning, is a continuity of experiences, interwoven experiences from within and from outside Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal culture determines how one learns without drowning the learner within its depth and breadth; rather, it has shown its inherent ability to

"take the best of two worlds and make a better life for our children" (Sitting Bull quoted in Medicine, 1995, p. 45)

Aboriginal learning, from my perspective, has four dimensions: renewal, initiation, balance and progress.

Renewal

Renewal is an affirmation of the inevitable limitations of existence, a reconnecting to and intertwining with sacred traditions, beliefs and practices. The pivotal traditional renewing spiritual element is the circle, as described by Black Elk:

> You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. . . . the circle of the four quarters . . . Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. . . . The life of man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves. (Neihardt, 1972, pp. 194-195)

The circle, in Aboriginal culture, is the means of dividing, but not severing, "what belongs to the ordinary or natural world ... and what belongs in the supernatural or spiritual world" (Hultkrantz, 1987, p. 23). The circle's *four quarters* is one source of the "sacred number four" that permeates many Aboriginal American cultures (p. 27). For example, the Cheyenne's four Sacred Arrows; Iroquois Four Beings, Seneca's and Onodaga's Four Ceremonies or Four Rituals; Navajo's four sacred mountains; Cree's four basic colours and four cardinal directions (Hoebel, 1960; Hultkrantz, 1987; Tooker, 1979).

Renewal of the spirit gives Aboriginal people the strength to "learn in the larger society and work in the dominant society without losing" their identity or forgetting their "cultural roots and the Native community" (Medicine, 1995, p. 45).

Initiation

Aboriginal cultures developed in a variety of educational environments. However, all emphasised their learners' initiation into, and passing on of, their societies accumulated wisdom. Learning in Aboriginal cultures is not to be adjudged as a conforming manipulator; rather, as it has always been, a means of awakening one's mind to "learn to look at the world twice if [one wishes] to see all that there is to see" (Highwater, 1981, p. 75). The Great Plains Aboriginal people "had no special educational institutions. Rather, the *social group as a whole* was the school of every growing mind" (Gresko, 1986, p. 89, italics in the original). Aboriginal learning was, and is today, a culturally distinctive environment emphasising "respect for all living things, sharing, self-reliance, individual responsibility, and proper conduct" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 3).

Aboriginal learning environments are holistically instrumentally complex structures of lived experiences integrating four learning components; oral, aural, visual and experiences. These components are divided into two learning phases; first, interactive oral/aural (listening/reflecting) and second, interactive visual/experience (seeing/doing).

Interactive learning: oral/aural

The oral component is the traditional means of entrusting and expressing Aboriginal cultural ideas, values and histories to successive generations. In Olson's (1977) opinion oral language, in the modern day context, is a "flexible, unspecialized, all purpose instrument with a low degree of conventionalization" (p. 10). However, two significant examples of Aboriginal oral traditions tend to refute his criticisms. The Iroquois orally maintained their *Great Law of Peace of the People of the Longhouse* consisting of 117 articles for several hundred years from about 1450 onward (Price, 1991, p. 4). The Cheyenne maintained orally their public and private laws with a "degree of juristic skill . . . on a level of which our [American] rarer and greater jurists would be proud" (Hoebel, 1960, p. 50).

The oral component is not merely the means of conveying information, a learning by instruction, in the Aboriginal environment it is an enlightening and interpretative presentation. Orally delivered lessons "stimulate the self-education of learning by discovery" (Brameld, 1971, p. 297).

The aural component values the sense of hearing, of listening intently "in a non-demonstrative, introspective way, experiencing fully what they hear" indicating respect for the speaker (Graveline, 1998, p. 64). Stories are a way of teaching children, however, hearing them over and over again as one

ages, "it is true, you can use those, the teachings from the stories, from the little sayings that they have" to stimulate new inner reflections (White & Archibald, 1992, p. 153). Aboriginal stories, records of beliefs, practices and worldview, always have, according to Saulteaux Elder Manitopeyes, something new to teach no matter how old the listener (Akan, 1992, p. 205). Story repetitions have been the means of promoting the development of the art of personal reflection; recalling, examining and analysing past and present situations (Gilliland, 1995. p. 81; Tafoya, 1995).

Aboriginal children, and adult learners, have shown a preference for repetition, "for the listener role as opposed to many non-Aboriginal learning characteristics that are concerned with structure, inquiry, and verbalization" (Boulton-Lewis, Martin, & Wilss, 2001, p. 141). The learning emphasis of the oral story telling[5] environment is on encouraging listeners to reflect upon the experiences of others. Listening and reflecting are the precursors to the visual and experiential components.

Interactive learning: visual/experiential

The visual component plays a significant part in phase two of the Aboriginal learning environment. It provides a " vivid, lasting, real, truthful, clarifying and convincing" means of

[5] At this point it is worth reflecting on what Smith (1999) wrote: "Story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. ... stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story" (pp. 144-145).

experiencing before the "learning by doing" (Percy, 2001, p. 369); "the boys of my people began very young to learn the ways of men, no one taught us; we just learned by doing what we saw" (Black Elk in Neihardt, 1972, p. 20). Aboriginal children are positioned as early observers and visualisers of the action of others (Heller, 1989). They observe adult dancers "to learn the rules of the dance from their performance" (Rhoner & Bettauer, 1970, p. 69) and then practice what they have seen before attempting to emulate the adult performances, "competence precedes performance" in public (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997, p. 143).

Children in the nomadic Cheyenne culture observed and practised adult activities "in play at incredibly early ages" (Hoebel, 1960, p. 92). Navajo children, given every opportunity to observe daily and ritual activities, are encouraged to demonstrate the physical skills seen in others (Philips, 1983). Such socialising experiences whereby young Aboriginal children imitate their parents, grandparents and other elderly interpersonal activities, fosters understanding of individual and group responsibilities.

When Aboriginal children engage in group learning experiences, they are "organized around people, with information only important as it relates to them", as another means of imparting values that reinforces the importance of community as a whole (Boulton-Lewis & Wilss, 2001, p. 113).

Philips (1983) compared groups of children in a classroom situation, some groups were Warm Springs Aboriginal children and the others were Anglo. The Anglo groups had readily identifiable leaders who attempted "to control the turns at talk and the actions of the others" (p. 120). The Warms Springs groups, when "asked to pick a leader . . . ignored that instruction and got on with the task at hand;" there was no conflict about who should act as a leader; rather, "suggestions were either ignored or supported verbally and carried out" (p. 120).

Learning by observing was traditionally "seen as a distinct social good" before engaging in public particular learned activity (Ross, 1992, p. 78). Aboriginal children, and adults, develop their social and physical skills through careful observation, and sharing and practising in private, until their time for public participation "felt right" (p. 79).

Balance

The educational legacies of Aboriginal people are grounded in their lived education and are environmentally balanced on three cohesive pillars: Elders, family and community. Lived education is an internal process in which individuals focus on and process selectively and differentially given learning materials within their ever-changing environment while retaining the best and most needed aspects of their culture and their individuality.

Respected Aboriginal Elders, in the Aboriginal oral teaching tradition, are role models. They speak and live Aboriginal truths, and pass traditional and cultural knowledge to present and future generations; they set community and family standards of behaviour (Lightning, 1992; Red Horse, 1990; Wilson, 1996). Aboriginal Elders, through enlightening interpretation, point out implications inherent in the subjects of their discourses, bringing a holistic approach to learning. Elders are, historically, defenders of the value of the extended family structure by their words, thoughts and deeds (Red Horse, 1990; Wilson, 1996)

An Aboriginal family is an agent of social control, living and teaching its way of life, ancestral beliefs and responsibilities to all family members. The extended family members serve as setters of standards, expectations and accountability as part of the larger kinship unit (Hoebel, 1960; Red Horse, 1990). Three primary strengths of Aboriginal families are helping each other; seeking peace with others, nature and the Creator; and in their "deep personal relationships" (Lewis, 1990, p. 10). Aboriginal extended families are not modelled on the European structure of three generations within a single household. Rather, Aboriginal extended families are "structurally open and . . . inclusive of several households representing significant relatives along both vertical and horizontal lines" (Red Horse, 1990, p. 68). Grandparents, in Aboriginal extended families, often have an

often have an official and symbolic leadership through caring for children and monitoring parents' behaviour. When looking at the extended Aboriginal family, one must also look at an Aboriginal community as a totality, a oneness.

The oneness of an Aboriginal community is reaffirmed in the collective physical enactment of renewal of an individual's link to his or her community. Enactments of renewal support a homogeneity that puts community members in direct touch with their identity, their culture and "its prescribed and perpetuated forms" (Highwater, 1981, p. 194). The theme of respect permeates all aspects of Aboriginal communities; it is a primary principle on which all relationships are built (Lewis, 1990). Respect is seen when learning of, and caring for, the experiences of others.

Progress

Progress is seen as the strength of Aboriginal people and their communities to judge the need for, or bring about, necessary changes to meet new or unexpected individual or community situations. Aboriginal experience and education and the environment in which they are conducted finds its mainstream counterpart described by Dewey (1938). Using his comparison of traditional and progressive education he questions is, "How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present?" (p. 23). This could be

rephrased as, how should Aboriginal youth become acquainted with their cultural past in a way that past experiences become a potent influence in appreciation of their culture's present life? Aboriginal learning is education through Elders, stories and experiences that have the potential to be a "moving force" (p. 38). Such experiences that engage the learner may be categorised as dynamic, temporal, spatial and pluralistic (Brameld, 1971; p. 102).

Dynamic and progressive experience is a moving force arousing curiosity, initiative, desire and purpose. A respected Aboriginal teacher, as Dewey (1938) would find, is therefore one who is "aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences" of those he guides into understanding, accepting and engaging in new experiences (p. 71). Temporal experiences are those experiences that are lived by the learner at the time and from which "the full meaning of each present experience" is preparation for the same experience in the future (p. 49). Spatial experience moves the learner from past experiences to "later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality" (p. 47).

And finally, pluralistic experience, consists of a vast interrelated network of environmental relationships taking the learner to the point where Dewey's two major principles are realised. The principle of continuity "of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those who have

gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35); and, the principle of interaction wherein "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (p. 43).

The principles of interaction and continuity are evident in learning experiences in an Aboriginal learner's environment since it is "intertwined with the daily lives of both teacher and learner. . . . The living place, the learner's extended family, the clan and tribe" (Cajete quoted in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 31). Aboriginal learning and teaching is often seen as an informal process within a high-context environment in which everything is interrelated in the shaping of personal experiences in "distinctive ways of knowing" that are "set solidly within a social context" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, pp. 160, 260). The informal Aboriginal learning process wherein learning is something that happens everyday and everywhere is interpreted as being a wholist learning orientation (Boulton-Lewis & Wilss, 2001, p. 113).

Learning in Later Life

Boulton-Lewis & Wilss' (2001) study of Aboriginal university students and Percy's (2001) study of indigenous university students spanning four continents indicated that the students' cultural legacies of early informal learning experiences

affected their approaches to formal learning settings. One cultural legacy that was seen was their willingness to first watch, observe and listen to others before trying or experimenting with practical applications. The indigenous students incorporated other culturally based learning perspectives: reflecting on and analysing mistakes, seeking guidance and listening to respected persons.

Boulton-Lewis and Wilss' (2001) and Percy's (2001) findings are also reflected in Rodriguez and Sawyers' (1990) report on adult Aboriginal learning preferences: watching, listening then trying; learning from respected experienced community members; "helping, waiting, watching, helping again" (pp. 42-43) Watching is a process of critical reflection while positioning the observed activity within the context of their socio-economic environment. Such learning, without attendant participation, may be second hand, however: "virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people's behavior and its consequences for the observer" (Bandura, 1976, quoted in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 259).

Such cultural learning legacies in older Aboriginal learners would, from Hall's (1976) perspective have sunk "below the surface of the mind and . . . be experienced as though they were innate simply because they are not only ubiquitous but habitual as well" (p. 42).

Aboriginal education is a continuously active transformation through lived understanding of the interconnectedness and value of sharing one's life with community, environment and self. Aboriginal education, a sharing process, is one in which the participant's investment in the process is predicated on their perceiving specific cultural values, for "learning, Vygotsky would say, is grounded in the very culture and in the very social setting in which people function" (Wilson, 1990, p. 64).

The studies of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal adults clearly indicate that even as they aged and experienced the world they retained their culture's distinctive ways of knowing and of learning. Therefore, the teaching of literacy to older Aboriginal people must be a flexible process that allows for cultural legacies that are manifested in "diverse ways of acquiring" literacy and learning styles (Heath, quoted in Street, 1984, p. 125). A flexible literacy process is one that accommodates different literacy legacies of learners who may have different and overlapping goals, needs and aspirations.

Issues in Literacy for Elderly Urban Aboriginal People

The issues concerning literacy for aged Aboriginal people are questions of values. These are addressed under the following headings: epistemology, ethics and social philosophy.

Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the learning and knowing between teacher and student (Brameld, 1971; Knight, 1989). In the current process of education, one with which Becker (1967) would agree, the young are being mildly encouraged to "criticize and master the world on their terms" (p. 38) indicating the "development of a wide range of forms of thought" (Harris, 1970, p. 29). The early learning and knowing for many elderly Aboriginal people was guided by "rather heavy-handed authoritarian coercive" schools "markedly different from" the schools of today (Mazurek, 1986, p. 31). For some the way they experienced formal learning "belongs to a world that no longer exists" (Moody, 1990, p. 25). Learning and knowing occurred then, and occurs now, in different ways at different ages. If learning today reflects new ways of knowing for the young is it not just as important for elderly Aboriginal people to be given the opportunity to access new ways of learning and knowing; and, if it is, is mainstream adult education capable of meeting their needs? And, how, within mainstream adult education, can elderly Aboriginal people expect to get education suited to *their* needs?

Elderly Aboriginal people are deemed by many to have no productive role in mainstream society wherein aging is a synonym for exclusion, whereas aging, in mainstream's educational realm, should include "a qualitative shift in the

consciousness of time" and if "empirical inquiries and philosophies of education . . . ignore this fact" time may prove to be "inadequate" (Moody, 1985, p. 36).

Ethics

Questions, often formed but unspoken, need to be addressed; is there a clearly perceived value and purpose to providing elderly urban Aboriginal people with the means to learn to read English and, the most fundamental question of all, why invest in literacy for elderly Aboriginal people? A person's age, related to a person's time nearer their death, may create an urgency or a realisation that one's remaining time is growing ever shorter and they become increasingly "alert to what remains of significance and value" (Paterson 1984, p. 151). Elderly Aboriginal people may see the value of acquiring the skill of reading English as a means of increasing their ability to better evaluate their situation within society and perhaps create a legacy for themselves and those who would follow them.

However, the teleological argument would begin, and perhaps end, with the question of justifiable and desirable future outcomes for the allocation of society's resources toward literacy programmes for elderly Aboriginal people. From a utilitarian perspective, would an investment in literacy for elderly Aboriginal people fit its primary tenet, the greatest happiness for the greatest number? The answer would likely be no; utilitarians and teleologists would not likely see future value

from allocating educational resources for elderly Aboriginal people.

Then, could one view elderly urban Aboriginal people as having become marginalized, not by their own actions, but by aging? Marginality, Bergevin (1967) notes, "is a matter of degree"; we are all, to a lesser or greater degree, marginal (p. 79). Bergevin lists four suggestions of how to deal with the marginal person:

1. Eliminating persons considered marginal.
2. Ignoring persons considered marginal as much as possible.
3. Helping these persons because it is necessary in order to preserve society.
4. Helping them because they need help.

The fourth approach "indicates a degree of understanding and maturity we have not yet reached" (p. 85). It would be fallacious to consider all elderly Aboriginal people as marginalized.

If, however, society's attitude toward their situation is no less genuine than society's demonstrated attitude toward marginalized, illiterate, older mainstream persons then elderly Aboriginal people are entitled to access education. As Williams (1948) stated, "any demand, however slight, which any creature, however weak, may make. Ought it not, for its own sake, to be satisfied? If not, prove why not" (p. 73).

Social Philosophy

The ethics discussion examined the value of having society provide elderly urban Aboriginal people access to literacy programmes. Social philosophy is concerned with value "when collective choices are made" (Moody, 1985, p. 42). In the case of elderly Aboriginal people, how can social philosophy respond to the value of allocating resources to a literacy programme for them?

Without assuming literacy programmes are culturally suitable for everyone, "we will have to discover new ways of reaching the potential of the least advantaged group among the aged" (Moody, 1985, p. 46). Among the least advantaged aged groups are elderly Aboriginal people; it is for them that their need for literacy has to be addressed.

A social philosophy of literacy for elderly Aboriginal people should not be one of denial, it should not categorise them, it should not view them as burdens on society nor in need of entertainment. A social philosophy of literacy for elderly Aboriginal people should, in a liberal democracy, posit and prescribe, equal access to literacy resources for their production of their knowledge as should be their right and "only a thoughtful social philosophy can adequately provide a reply to their demands" (p. 43). Their situation is not solely one of economics but also of cultural values.

Agism

Robert Butler, once the Director of the United States National Institute of Aging in the 1960s, defined agism as a "process of systematic stereotyping, of discriminating against people because they are old" (McDaniel, 1986, p. 56). The prejudice of agism also "refers to unequal opportunities for individuals as they grow older" (Atchley referenced in Rybash, Roodin, & Hoyer, 1995, p. 34). In urban settings it has been found that the status of some elderly Aboriginal people has reached the point where "concern has been raised . . . that the respect for the aged Aboriginal is diminishing and abuse increasing" (Hohn, 1986, p. 10). This may be a reflection of the increasing mainstream attitude of "laissez-faire, survival-of-the-fittest, every man for himself concept of society, each individual theoretically having an equal opportunity to succeed" (Estes, 1993, p. 19).

There are older mainstream persons who, having had recognisable achievements in public or private domains, are praised by society and held in high esteem. They were often conferred the title of "elder statesman" or "public visionary." However, for the vast majority of older mainstream and Aboriginal persons of lesser status, agism can be a type of prejudice just as is sexism or racism.

Accompanying such discrimination is the view held by some that, within their community settings, older mainstream and

Aboriginal people should be "more passive participants in economic, political, and community life and perhaps play a less active role" (Elmore, 2000, pp. 52-53). In urban settings there can be found some elderly Aboriginal people who are isolated from and devalued by their own families (Saskatchewan Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, 1988; Hohn, 1986).

Isolation

Agism also means isolation for many elderly, mainstream and Aboriginal people, who are often dismissed with the expression "that out of sight is out of mind."[6] There are elderly urban Aboriginal people who, because of the generational squeeze, are isolated within their own family. The elderly person's own children need to provide support and assistance both up and down the generation within their family; however, some Aboriginal families have "adopted the white way of doing things, you just put your mom or your grandmother or whatever in the old folks home and just leave them" (Jessie a researcher of on- and off-reserve elderly Aboriginal people, quoted in Parks, 1997, p. 89).

Agism also brings, for some elderly Aboriginal people, a deterioration of their health. Armstrong-Esther, et al. (1997) found that many Aboriginal people "in their 50s show levels of ill-health and disability most typically associated with non-Aboriginal people in their mid-70s" (p. 7). Adding to their health problems, degenerative diseases are more likely to affect

[6] Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1860), Song of Absence.

Aboriginal people "earlier and with greater intensity" (p. 7). Of those elderly Aboriginal people who had to move to an urban setting for extended health care services some have been left alone in an urban setting as the younger family members returned to their reserves. The Saskatchewan Senior Citizens' Provincial Council (1988) study found that families of elderly Aboriginal seniors, whose ill-health or physical impairment required them to live in an urban setting were, for all intents and purposes, abandoned by their families. The family of an elderly Aboriginal woman in ill health at first came to the city to live with her, but over time they all moved back to the reserve, leaving her on her own.

> Watching her make tea and trying to fend for herself was a pitiful situation . . . I asked her why she had not requested a family worker to do her required tasks. She stated that she . . . was not told of family workers or of any other services . . . if she was told in English she would not have understood what they were telling her . . . she did not know the names of any organizations such as the Métis Society or Friendship Centre. The day she can return to the reserve and see all of her relatives [is what] keeps her going [even though four years have gone by]. (p. 127)

Alienation

There are elderly urban Aboriginal people who, illiterate in English have, within the urban setting, been estranged and devalued by reason of their age and their ethnicity. As with older mainstream persons elderly Aboriginal persons have become users of, as others perceive it, limited social and educational resources. Those who hold these narrow views are

adumbrating, outlining or foreshadowing, their notion of alienation.[7] They hold in part, that the aged should not need, or be given, access to resources such as education. Although education for older mainstream person is, and has been, carried out by many publicly funded institution such as schools, universities, libraries and literacy services; these institutions are continually faced with ongoing "demands to justify such programs and [the] allocation of resources for them" (Moody, 1985, p. 43).

Faced with the questioning of the value of literacy for elderly Aboriginal people there is the temptation to turn the questioning back on itself; why not literacy for elderly Aboriginal people? There are elderly Aboriginal people who, illiterate in English, are seen as passive souls doomed to exist as non-participants, becoming objects of history rather than authors of their own destinies (Rahnema, 1978, p. 166). The value of literacy for elderly Aboriginal people is to present them with an opportunity to give them another means of expressing their experiences and worldviews.

Enlightenment

Not all elderly Aboriginal people want, or see the value in learning to read English. Moody (1985) sees education's ethical

[7] There are several dictionary definitions of alienation, one of which is, the state of being an outsider or the feeling of being isolated, as from society. In religion, for some, alienation from God for all time was the result of man's fall into original sin. The word alienation for Becker (1967) is "*the* word that characterizes our time" (p. 88). It is a concept that that sees man "trying to lay hold of the knowledge he needs in order to free himself" (p. 88). For those who advocate on behalf of elderly urban Aboriginal people "alienation is a value problem which states and sums up the fact that things should be better than they are" (p. 106).

task as one of helping "older learners find a just balance in appraising their own limits and possibilities, without fostering either illusion or hopelessness" (p. 42). In this, two elements must be given consideration, motive and time.

Motive is an elusive individual quality that begs measurement. It has been explicated by numerous theorists including, Maslow (1968), Miller (1967), Lewin (1958) and McClelland, Atkinson, Clark and Lowell (1953). In Miller's (1967) opinion lower socio-economic persons would be motivated, if "attracted by a form of education that satisfies the lower-order needs, survival, safety, and a sense of belonging"; while higher socio-economic groups would be motivated, or attracted to education that emphasised "self-esteem, achievement, and self-actualisation" (Miller in Knox, 1991, pp. 204-5). However, the motive to acquire literacy, at a low or higher level of skill, may not result from *a priori* motives but rather from *a posteriori* experience; seeing the benefits of literacy learning "can even create the motivation, if it did not previously exist" (Bernardo, 1998, p. 134).

Studies of older persons' educational motives have been limited primarily by "the existing range of programs available to any given senior population" (Manheimer et al., 1995, p. 22). Many studies into the motivation of older persons' educational programmes have been quantitative and fall "short of providing deeper insight into how older participants think about their own

motives" (p. 23). McClusky (1970b) believed that education services for older person should "be an instrument for helping deliver the services set up to meet the survival needs of Older Persons" (p. 10).

Time, biological time, often precludes an older person from taking on learning tasks that appear to be without end. For some older mainstream and elderly Aboriginal people "the sense of time is more constricted and choices must be made with the recognition of finitude in mind" (Moody, 1990, p. 37). For others time is the presumed time left to live as seen in "time-by-the-clock" aging; to them it means that there are fewer years remaining in which to add lived experiences (Moody, 1985, p. 29). However, there are elderly Aboriginal people who view "time-lived" experiences, as an encounter with aging within which there is the potential for engaging in a "growing richness in the quality of experience itself" (p. 29).

Time-by-the-clock elderly are those who live on the memories of past successes, fail to modify past experience resulting in "a failure to live in the present, a failure to transcend the past" (Moody, 1990, p. 36). They live more and more in the past when they realise that, in their way of viewing their life, the future is a mirage and the "idea of advancing toward a goal a delusion" (de Beauvoir, quoted in Moody, 1990, p. 36). Whereas, transcendence for time-lived elderly means not denying or recanting past experiences rather rediscovering new

meanings from past experiences. Transcendence also allows their oldness to pass "as if it were unnoticed" while committing themselves "to undertakings that set time at defiance" (de Beauvoir quoted in Moody, 1990, p. 34).

Literacy and Learner Involvement

A review of available literacy programmes indicates that literacy programmes are owned by the literate. Mainstream teachers and administrators of literacy programmes, government or privately sponsored, treat the delivery of their programmes as a mysterious and complex process. There are adult educators who "doubt the soundness of providing educational programs for older learners at public expense" (Merriam and Lumsden, 1985, p. 53), a clear indication of who wants to retain ownership of literacy programmes. And many of these "mysterious and complex" literacy programmes do little to fulfil the promise of literacy for elderly urban Aboriginal people.

If elderly Aboriginal people were to take control over their own literacy process it could become "in itself, a tool for reflection and change" (Horsman, 1994, p. 180). However, what is needed is a commitment by elderly Aboriginal people to become involved in a culturally appropriate literacy process. There are, of course, some elderly Aboriginal people who just want to be taught while their are others, through active participation in a learning process, might accept some responsibility for its success if the approach was seen to be one

in which they had ownership.[8] A participative approach could possibly be one catalyst for bringing some elderly urban Aboriginal learners to the point where they would involve themselves in contributing to a literacy approach that would approximate the educational legacies of Aboriginal learning.

Implementing a participative literacy programme for elderly Aboriginal people should begin with a general outline that is developed and designed within a culturally sensitive flexible approach. Scribner (1986) has noted, today's literacy standards have to be "considered in light of tomorrow's requirements" (p. 11). Flexibility would give elderly Aboriginal participants the power to "personalise" a literacy approach that caters to their experiences, their learning tempo and their individual needs. Scribner (1986), looking at the boundaries of literacy, sets in motion a way of viewing literacy approaches that could complement the educational legacies of Aboriginal learning.

Scribner's Three Literacy Approaches

Scribner (1986) synthesised three literacy approaches as three strategic discriminations that she refers to, metaphorically, as "adaptation," "a state of grace" and "power" (p. 9). Although her metaphors are "rooted in certain assumptions about the social motivations for literacy" they provide a "partial grasp" of their boundaries and literacy uses (p. 9).

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[8] Ownership, for example, of cultural information, medical knowledge, education, stories and art, is an issue that has been, and continues be, passionately defended by Aboriginal people around the world (Nixon, 1996, p. 1; Spears, 2004, p. A13).

The adaptive tool. This literacy tool is pragmatic and of a functional nature. It is more familiarly known as functional literacy, a term that was introduced in World War I referring to skills needed by soldiers "to meet the tasks of modern soldiering" (Scribner, 1986, p. 10). Bhola (1984) has written extensively on the concept of functional literacy as programmes whose broad intention is to impress on individuals, institutions, groups and communities, literacy's impact on their socio-economic and political environment. For Thomas (1991) and Hinzen (1994) a functionally literate individual has the tools that provide the means to intervene in his or her community's development. This pragmatic approach, where individuals are provided a literacy that can function in the community today may, tomorrow, find their literacy skills were "time-limited" (Scribner, 1986, p. 11). Functional literacy has been seen as the tool used by some states to create and then rent out their literate workers to foreign multinational companies who then engage in that state's particular economic venture. The use of such time limited functional literates often disguises a state's "underlying political and ideological framework" (Street, 1984, p. 184).

A state of grace. Scribner (1986) depicts a state of grace as one in which societies "endow the literate person with special virtues" (p. 14). Literacy campaigns are, most often, instituted for short specific goals; economic development or political

realities. Underlying these campaigns are such expressions as, "transformation," "empowerment," "development," "crisis," or "break the cycle of." Those who are the leaders of literacy campaigns are usually found at the upper echelons and self-endowed with special virtues. In economically enhanced countries, the divide between those who have mastered literacy, the upper echelons, and those who have not "is deeply entrenched in educational circles" (Scribner, 1986, p. 15).

The power tool. The purpose of literacy as Marx saw it, was to perpetuate the prevailing elitist values, ensure social stability and sustain the status quo (Harris, 1982, p. 6; Wink, 1997, p. 69). However, "literacy does not occur in isolation;" sharing and a common environment implies that individuals feel their voice is being understood and that they can understand the voice of others (Fagan, 1993, p. 227). Sharing and a common environment was emphasised in Freire's literacy approach of "problematising the total social reality within which 'problems' occur" (Street, 1984, p. 186). Kassam (1994) views literacy as a potent tool for empowerment, for liberation from dependency and gaining a voice for assertively and meaningfully participating "in decisions that affects one's life" (p. 33). For, although literacy may be a powerful means of political change, it may also be seen as a tool for oppression (Freire, 1993). However, the inescapable power of literacy is clearly seen in how it provokes, and has provoked, people to think and

interpret their own, and others, lived experiences within their environments (Bernardo, 1998; Walsh, 1991).

Scribner's literacy approaches are summarised as follows:

Literacy Components	Scribner's Adaptive	Literacy State of Grace	Metaphors Power
Participants	Unemployed/ educated upgrade	Under educated	Marginalised
Primary Movers	State supported literacy programmes	Literate elites/ Social elites	Social partners
Purpose	State/industry economics	Personal enhancement	Transformation/ liberation
Motivation level	Reluctant	Individual choice	Tempered

The selection of a literacy approach by a learner is contingent upon the learner's experience, needs and period in his or her life. Productive aged adults' needs are focused on adaptive literacy that enhances their career opportunities while many literate older persons seek state of grace educational experiences. The literacy approach that most nearly accommodates itself to the Aboriginal learning philosophy is the literacy of power.

On the one hand, Scribner's (1986) "literacy-as-power metaphor" (p. 12) is supported by some who advocate that the control of literacy is the route the poor and politically

powerless should take in order to "claim their place in the world" (p. 13). On the other hand, power literacy could be viewed as the route that encourages elderly urban Aboriginal people to take control of, and have an ownership role in, a literacy process that could be used effectively to achieve their "personal goals involving language to bring about change, and to feel good about the outcome" (Fagan, 1993, p. 227). Such a literacy approach could bring elderly Aboriginal people into a social partnership with literacy educators igniting, or re-igniting, a "sense of discovery" complementing their "experience and special assets" (McClusky, 1970a, p. 90; 1970b, p. 8)

Relationship, Participation and Implementation

Scribner's (1986) literacy as power is a relational process; "a relationship between literacy and group or community advancement" (p. 12). Reducing the relationship to constituent elements reveals the need to consider cultural variations, meanings, local needs and community involvement. Undertaking a culturally appropriate participative literacy approach for elderly urban Aboriginal people has to be taken with a clear understanding of their social settings, personal situations, educational and personal experiences. A participative approach could awaken the interests of elderly urban Aboriginal people into taking an ownership role in a literacy programme. Taking ownership could overcome their disconnection from formal education.

Summary

Aging alone does not create powerless, uncritical, elderly, urban Aboriginal participants in their urban society. Rather, it is the lack of responses to their obtaining literacy that, for reasons of health or socio-economic situations that are beyond their control, often leaves them standing at the margins of our society. Philosophies of education for older persons recognise their prior knowledge and experiences and their need to be, with the assistance of educators, responsible for their own learning (Bergevin, 1967; Knowles, 1990; Whelan, 1988). When elderly Aboriginal people become involved in their literacy process it could give them assurance that what is being offered has cultural values that reflect their needs and desires (Brookfield, 1987; Dame, 1997; Macedo, 1994).

Chapter 3

DESIGN

This chapter describes the design of the research study, the selection of the participants, data collection and analysis and the learn-to-read-English literacy process. Facilitating an appropriate literacy approach with elderly urban Aboriginal people was done with regard to their contexts and their socio-economic settings.

Design of the Study

The design approach was interpretivist based on qualitative methods. The learn-to-read-English literacy process provided the means of exposing and understanding factors that contributed to the learning processes of the elderly Aboriginal participants. The co-operative and participative aspects of the design coupled with observation, conversations and fieldnotes contextualised the selective and interpretative nature of the findings.

Selection of the Learning Approach

The research process borrows from Archibald, Selkirk Brown, Pepper, Urion, Mirenhouse, and Shortt (1995) the notion of flexibility, adaptability and a demonstration of the "Aboriginal principles of respect and honour that" are consistent with Aboriginal teaching and learning (pp. 15-16).

I selected phonics as the learn-to-read-English literacy process. Phonics was a learning approach that lent itself to a culturally compatible literacy process for the elderly urban Aboriginal participants.

The phonics used for this learn-to-read-English literacy study was based on several sources, namely, Burmeister (1975), Ekwall (1976), Heilman (1967), Mazurkiewicz (1976) and Watson (1966). The most referenced source was from a series of comic-like strips entitled "Short Cuts to Reading" published by the Ottawa Journal in 1966. Their material was based on a system designed by Dorothy Taft Watson, a reading expert and kindergarten teacher from Oakland, California.

The first requirement was to organise the phonics modules in a manner that would not overwhelm the participants but would engage each elderly participant in a process within which they would feel comfortable. Although the participants, as a group, had not had any contact with any formal educational institutions for five to six decades, they had had exposure to the English language through the medium of television and public advertising. However, such exposure does not necessarily translate into learning to decode written English. The acquisition of the skill to read English is a process that requires a learner to decode "up to 211 distinct letter sound correspondences, 166 rules (60 of which relate to consonants), 45 exception to rules (which are rules in themselves), and 69

spelling-pattern rules" (Mazurkiewicz, 1976, p. 4). A beginner reader of English must read "not only from left to right but also from right to left to decode words" (p. 3).

The phonics approach was selected for two reasons; first, it was suited to setting a flexible pace of learning in accordance with what each participant was comfortable; and, it lent itself to the use of mnemonic images as complementary "cueing structures" (Turnure & Lane, 1987, p. 332).

The second requirement was to select the initial mnemonic images to complement the high-context, field-dependent learning style attributed to adult learners in and from Aboriginal cultures (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Hall, 1976; Philips, 1983; Shipman & Shipman, 1985; Wilson, 1991). If "the ability to write is closely connected with the ability to hear what a written text would sound like when read aloud" (Ong, 1980, p. 198), then it follows that seeing an mnemonic image closely connected to the sound of its companion letter or a word may tend to decrease the mystery of the written symbol.

This research process began with commonly recognised mnemonic images, selected from the computer software programme The Print Shop,[9] as interactive, experiential, visual aids in enhancing and relating speech sounds (graphemes) of

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[9] The use of The Print Shop ("Properties") must include a TLC credit as follows: "The images used herein were obtained from The Learning Company's The Print Shop product © 1999 TLC Multimedia Inc., and its affiliates and licensors. 88 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945 USA. All right reserved.... The Properties may be used for home entertainment, personal, and educational purposes only, and cannot be used for any product distributed commercially for sale" (1999, p. 184).

individual and multiple letters (Phonemes) (McDaniel & Waddill, 1994; Turnure & Lane, 1987; Yesavage, Lapp, & Sheikh, 1989). The mnemonic images provided the participants with "little pictures or associations" of letter sounds or words as they are read or heard (Sinatra, 1986, p. 24). However, if a mnemonic image did not reflect or awaken elderly urban Aboriginal participant's prior experiences, a search of The Print Shop was made to find an appropriate, experience related, replacement mnemonic image.

Phonics Modules

The following is an outline of the phonics modules used in this learn-to-read-English literacy process.

(a) discriminating the sounds of speech in words,

(b) matching speech sounds to written letters,

(c) recognising letters and sounds in unknown words,

(d) sounds of single consonants, initial and final position in words,

(e) sounds of blended consonants, e.g., br, cr, pl, thr,

(f) sounds of digraphs, e.g., th, ch, wh,

(g) vowel sounds, e.g., long and short vowels, double vowels, adjacent vowels, vowels followed by r, effect of final e, and y sounded as long i,

(h) silent consonants, e.g., mit*t*, *k*not,

(i) syllabication, and,

(j) accent, stress and intonation of words.

Participants' Phonics Workbook

The phonics modules were designed for use with first time learn-to-read-English elderly urban Aboriginal participants. The phonics modules were printed on 8.5 inch by 11 inch unlined worksheets. Each participant was given a three ring binder. As the participants progressed through the phonics modules, printed worksheets were added to their workbook binders (Appendix D).

Technical Support

The learn-to-read-English sessions were conducted in the homes of the Aboriginal participants. A laptop computer was used as a secondary means of literacy presentations. The laptop computer used in this study was a Hewlett Packard HP OmniBook 4150 with interchangeable modules for a floppy disc and a CD-ROM reader.

The laptop computer provided a portable "blackboard" to supplement the phonics modules. The participants had, without exception, an extensive oral knowledge of the English language. Instruction was not confined to the material in the workbook; the laptop computer was used to display workbook words within whole sentences and other words whose initial letter had a similar sound to the applicable phonics module letters.

Two printers were used in this study; an Epson 777 colour printer for the printing of workbook pages and a Hewlett Packard Laser Jet IIIP, for the printing of black print text material.

Writing and the Proto-Alpha Keyboard

Developing the hand and eye co-ordination to form written letters can be, for some illiterate elderly urban Aboriginal people, physically difficult. However, I felt it was important to encourage the participants to communicate through writing as well as reading.

What was needed was a keyboard that was elderly user friendly; one that had large easily read alphabet inscribed keys, arrayed on three tiers in the standard alphabetic sequence (King, 1997, p. 5). My search of available computer key boards found that there were no such keyboards available. I then made a decision to create a proto-alpha keyboard for use in this study (Appendix B).

Recruitment of Participants

I was a member of the urban Native seniors' centre and knew many of its elderly urban Aboriginal members. I also contacted several other seniors agencies; one provided the name of a possible participant. However, at the urban Native seniors' centre I took on the role of a "complete participant" observer (Spradley, 1980, p. 61). Taking on the participant observer role necessitated a four step approach.

The first step was to contact the Aboriginal seniors' centre outreach worker and the centre's director, to explain to them what and why I was undertaking the literacy research project

and to ensure that there were no other outside research demands on the centre's membership. Once they had accepted my research undertaking I moved on and, with the assistance of the centre's outreach worker elderly urban Aboriginal members, whom she knew could not read English, were identified.

The second step was the observation activity. I had the opportunity to observe, during social events such as the weekly soup and bannock lunch, the social interactions of the centre's previously identified potential elderly urban Aboriginal study participants. And, with the aid of the centre's outreach worker, determined those who, within the social groupings, appeared to be the dominant members. The outreach worker stated that several of the dominant members had often taken on the role of an intermediary for some of the centre's elderly members.

The third step was, in company with the outreach worker, to approach several of the dominant elderly Aboriginal members. I explained to them what my study involved and that it had a research time frame of six months. I then asked them if they would act on my behalf as intermediaries and approach those elderly Aboriginal members whom they considered to be potential study participants. They responded positively with some expressing the opinion that it was "about time" for a literacy programme for the "old ones" provided it was done with "respect."

There are some respected urban Aboriginal people who, while maintaining friendship ties and ancestral identity to their reserves, have by necessity perceived themselves as also belonging in the urban setting, creating a dual-orientation context. Within this dual-orientation these Aboriginal people view their urban world in socio-economic terms while seeing their reserves "in terms of ideology and social ties" (Price & McCaskill, 1974, p. 45). For some this dual-orientation provides them the basis for recognition by their peers as advisers or intermediaries for urban Aboriginal people who may be isolated or incapacitated by reason of health or financial constraints.

The role of intermediary bestows upon them a relationship that often, by necessity, transcends the dominant Aboriginal ethic of "non-interference" (Ross, 1992, p. 12). An urban Aboriginal intermediary who gives aid or advice to another Aboriginal person has to be a person who is highly respected within their urban Aboriginal community (Kerri, 1976; Price & McCaskill, 1974).

The intermediaries discussed my research project with their friend or relative; on some of these occasions I was present. The intermediaries encouraged them to take part in my literacy project suggesting that they "might enjoy it."

In the following weeks I was given permission, in the presence of their chosen intermediary, to speak to each possible

elderly participant. I explained to each of them the purpose of the research study, the projected time frame, the personal value I might gain from the research project and what the participants could expect from me. I asked them to take some time to talk it over with their intermediaries before making a decision about their participation in the research project.

Later, those who made the decision to participate in the study did, in the presence of their intermediaries, sign, or made his or her mark, on an ethics protocol form (Appendix A). A copy of their ethics protocol form was given to each participant and his or her intermediary.

The fourth step, after receiving agreement from possible study participants, was one-on-one meetings with the elderly Aboriginal participants. These meetings, sanctioned by the intermediaries, were for me to meet with the potential elderly Aboriginal participants in their homes. The meetings, without the presence of the intermediaries, marked the first opportunity to open a dialogue of tutor to learner.

Elderly Urban Aboriginal Participants' Decisions

One participant, an elderly Aboriginal woman, had attended a literacy programme, however, she had left after only several classes. She said that a participative approach to literacy had some appeal for her. She agreed to join the study.

Another participant had attended a literacy programme with limited success. In our discussions she felt that a different

approach would be worth trying. The other four potential volunteers agreed to "give it a try" (after some persuasion from their intermediaries).

Within the first two weeks of the study one participant had a family situation develop that required her to travel to another province. She was going away for an undetermined period and had to withdraw from the study. Another participant withdrew because she had "changed her mind." The intermediary who had encouraged her to participant in the study told me that the participant's change of mind was because she was a quiet "shy" person who tended to "keep to herself."

Four elderly participants stayed for the duration of this study.

Involvement of Participants

The involvement of the elderly Aboriginal participants in this study reflected one of Lindeman's (1926/1961) principles: learning should be "built around the student's needs and interests" (p. 6). In this study four elements were considered: their motivations, their supportive environments, their participation and the respect that was due them.

Motivation of older learners may fall under two general categorisations, a search for "personal or social satisfaction" (Peterson, 1986, p. 43) or an "underlying drive and energy" (Dohr & Portillo, 1990, p. 214). Therefore, a literacy process

should be selected and presented in an environment that contributes to, or supports, an older participant's personal motivation.

Literacy environments may be viewed as three types: authoritative, guiding and participative. An authoritative environment is one in which learning individuals do that which is required of them with little consideration by the teacher for their learners' interests (Wynne, 1947, p. 113). A guiding environment is one in which the teacher sets the stage to justify what he or she deems to be desirable experiences for literacy participants (p. 132). A participative literacy environment engages and stimulates the learner to interact with experiences, the good and the bad, that are "on the whole, acceptable to the individual" learner (p. 140).

Participation is an activity of everyday life. It can also be seen as one means of taking advantage of the knowledge and experience of others. In this study participation is the means of engaging elderly Aboriginal people, even though their experiences with education processes were limited, in an ongoing assessment of the learn-to-read-English phonics modules presentations.

However, as Schwarz (1999) found, older persons may have some difficulty in keeping track of, and focused on, the subject under discussion. Elderly participants may, on some occasions, treat the discussions of changes or improvements to a literacy

process "as a social event rather than a task-oriented exchange of information" (p. 38).

Respecting the wishes of the participants. I asked each participant how much of their past they wished to discuss. What they did not want to do was to talk too much about themselves, nevertheless they all agreed that they would share their early education and some of their current social experiences. However, as we progressed through the study we also exchanged information about ourselves and our mutual acquaintances.

Informed Consent

The University of Alberta's policy, section 66, Human research -- University of Alberta Standards of the protection of human research participants provides the parameters for my Ethics protocol given to and signed by the elderly urban Aboriginal volunteer participants.

In accordance with section 66.9.2 Documentation of consent "evidence of free and informed consent by the participant or authorized third party should be ordinarily obtained in writing." For this study a section was added for the signature of a third party witness who confirmed that the details of the ethics protocol were correctly read and the study process was explained to the satisfaction of the third party and understood by the volunteer participants (Appendix A). All elderly

Aboriginal participants were given a copy of their signed ethics protocol.

Section 2 of the ethics protocol was added to be completed at the conclusion of this study for the participants who wish to have their name included in the acknowledgement section of this study. This section was added after consulting with two Aboriginal Elders. The University of Alberta ethics committee's reservation was that inclusion of participants' names in the study's publication might jeopardise the confidentiality of other participants. The response, through this researcher, was that the elderly urban Aboriginal participants, who did not read or write English, did not perceive this as a personal deficit.

Methods of Collecting Data

Conversations "as a method of obtaining knowledge" (Kvale, 1996, p. 8) can be, and were, short interviews that allowed the participants the maximum opportunity to articulate their literacy experiences (Frager, 1991; Patton, 1980). The "interview product results not from a one-way flow of information initiated by the interviewer" but, in this study, as an interchange between equals in age and in some experiences (Kwong See & Ryan, 1999, p. 247). However, establishing rapport within a conversational atmosphere may cause difficulty in remaining on the topic under discussion (McPherson, 1983, p. 120).

Participant observations were used with the realisation that the researcher is also part of the experiment and may influence some aspects of the research (Spradley, 1980; Travers, 1969). Participant observations were made in three specific areas; the environment in which the literacy learning was conducted, the responses of the participants to the learn-to-read-English phonics modules presentations and the relationships of the Aboriginal participants to me as their tutor.

I asked each participant for permission to make written notes during our sessions with regard to their comments about the learn-to-read-English material. Other notes were written, when possible, after each session; there were times when I had to travel immediately from the study site of one participant to that of another.

The participants were informed that they would receive a draft and a final copy of the study.

Data Analysis

The intent of this study was, in partnership with the elderly Aboriginal participants, to become aware of some of the factors that, when incorporated in a learning approach, could encourage elderly Aboriginal persons to engage in a literacy process.

Conversations with, and recorded comments by, the elderly participants during the period of the study and later reflections revealed some of the underlying elements of Aboriginal learning.

Trustworthiness of the findings. The study took place over a period of nine months. I spent the majority of my time with the four study participants in one-on-one literacy learning sessions. My age at the time of the study, 69, meant that I was a contemporary of the participants whose ages ranged from 64 to 72 years. As a result my previous casual contacts with three of the participants, through our common membership in an Aboriginal seniors' centre, my relationship with them was probably closer than what one might expect when using participant observation as a research approach. However, I do not believe my relationships with the participants made my findings any less significant.

Observations and conversations were the primary means of collecting data. Observing and listening to the conversations of each intermediary with four of six of the study's participants provided, in part, to the establishment of the elements; independence, experience, ownership and so on. During the one-on-one tutor sessions, conversations and after session recorded fieldnotes, added to the data establishing the notion of the participants' support elements.

A search specifically for literacy programmes associated with elderly Indigenous or Aboriginal people and their participation in a learning to read research programmes did not turn up any significant material. For example, the focus of the Rodriquez and Sawyer (1990) study was adult education with no

indication that elderly Aboriginal persons were specifically targeted. A Medicine Hat College two year pilot project, "Something Special for Seniors," a literacy programme "in which seniors tutor seniors" (Ramsay, 1993, A1) was not renewed and left no published material on the process or results of the programme.[10]

Summary

This chapter outlined the study's learn-to-read-English literacy approach designed to engage elderly urban Aboriginal participants in a learning situation. The steps followed to select the elderly urban Aboriginal study participants, methods for collecting data, data analysis and trustworthiness of the data, were described.

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[10] I had a telephone conversation on 31 March 1996 with Medicine Hat College adult education department spokeswomen; she stated that the programme ceased when the funding was not renewed. She knew of no publications of findings or of the literacy processes arising out of the "Something Special for Seniors" project.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to engage, and describe the experiences of, the elderly urban Aboriginal participants who involved themselves in this study's learn-to-read-English literacy process. The findings are as much about the face-to-face interaction with the study's elderly urban Aboriginal participants as it is about the learn-to-read-English literacy process. The research processes used in this study, informal interviews and participant observation, allowed for broader interpretations and perceptions through descriptive analysis.

The findings are considered under the study's research questions. Integrated within the findings are observations of the participants' learning approaches. The chapter concludes with an overview of learning approaches that complement Aboriginal educational legacies.

Research question 1: Of the elderly urban Aboriginal people who participated in this study:

a. what were their educational backgrounds?

The participants were born at a time and place when education was, for many, not seen as a significant need. Rather the basic requirements for the 1920s to early 1940s labour work

forces were physical stamina and a good work ethic. Thus, the study participants had very brief relationships with their rural or reserve schools.

Education on reserves in the 1940s was, "until 1945, education in isolation" with curricula that were not "geared to either [students'] language difficulties or their sociological needs" (Frideres, 1988, p. 174). Furthermore, for those who did attend reserve schools educational instruction was not "at much more than a grade 5 level" (Daniels, 1973, p. 79).

Many elderly urban Aboriginal people have similar rural socio-economic backgrounds. For the participants, and for this researcher, this study was an adventure in learning. Not all elderly persons learn at the same pace nor in the same way. In any, and perhaps all, learning situation exchanges between a learner and a teacher each gives the other new information, each subtly influencing the other. Often the best a learner and a teacher can do together is to mutually promote a willingness to explore and take all that they can from a learning adventure.

Introducing the participants. The participants had agreed, in the ethics protocol, that their names could be used in the body of this study. However, after considering the - practice in private, perform in public - Aboriginal learning admonition, I asked each participant to provide pseudonyms to which they could relate. Two participants chose names of one of their many

grandchildren, another chose the name of an old friend. The male participant chose a name that, he was told by a lady friend, was that of a man who had been considered attractive to women. Even though all participants had taken careful consideration in the choosing of their pseudonyms one participant later changed her mind about the name she had chosen and decided that her new name sounded "nicer."

Romeo was an unmarried quiet spoken 67 year old Aboriginal man in good health residing in a mixed culture seniors' apartment complex. His only source of income was the supplemented Canadian old age pension. He did not own a car and "had not bothered to learn to drive one; I use the buses or I walk to where I want to go unless it's downtown." He went to bingo once or twice a week; "I don't always win anything but I enjoy going to different bingo places. Sometimes I meet someone I know there and then it is nice." Romeo watched television in the morning but did not like the "soap shows, I like to watch cowboy shows and hockey games."

Romeo spent a lot of his time at an Aboriginal seniors' centre. "My friend H--- is an Aboriginal Veteran and he had me join the vets group. My brother was in the war, he went overseas. He was older than me." Romeo helped plant the garden plot at that the Aboriginal Seniors' Centre. He, and several other Centre members, went to the garden plot once or twice a week to "weed and water it." For the past few years

"not as many people were going out and last year I and D--- were the only ones going. D--- had to go away so there was no one but me left to do the garden so I stopped doing it."

Romeo enjoyed going to the seniors' centre and to help with anything that needed to be done; "sometimes I went with the van driver to pick up some of our people. Sometimes I would help H--- with the vets stuff. I can't read but I could carry stuff out to H--'s car when there was a meeting or we were taking the flags to a pow-wow. I went to pow-wows with the vets and to Lac St. Anne with H---."

When Romeo was asked to describe his early schooling he said it was okay but that being a "half-breed" sometimes going to school "was not so nice." "My father and mother were half-breeds. We spoke Cree at home. My father surveyed for road building. He learned to read and write English from his boss. My mother did not learn to read and write." Romeo began attending school at the age of eight years in a small northern Alberta village. "I was the only Cree speaking student in the school. I spent seven years in grade two. My brothers and sisters took off [from school] they didn't like it." When Romeo left school at 14 years of age the "school ma'am said that I was at a grade two level of learning."

Romeo was unclear as to why he spent "seven years in grade two." As a child he was expected to work at home and on the adjacent farm owned by another Aboriginal family member. It

may be that, as with many land focused Aboriginal families, school was only a few months in the off-season, or winter months. During the 1930s and 1940s short stints at school were common with many prairie families, Aboriginal and mainstream.

Romeo kept in close touch with his Aboriginal family, a niece, and his Aboriginal friends. The friend he was closest to was H---. The Aboriginal seniors' centre was also a major focus of his social life. Staying within this self-created social circle was very comfortable for him. "I am happy with my friends and family I have. I like to help them because they help me."

Angela was a 69 year old widow. Angela lived in rented accommodation with her daughter and son-in-law. She had been born in the Battlefords area of Saskatchewan. At the age of 7 she went to a "Nun's school" for one year then had to leave school to work at home helping her mother. Angela's father worked for area farmers and the family lived in a house on one of the farms. They lived on that farm for 13 years. The farmer's daughter who was Angela's friend, attended the local school everyday. When they played together the friend would "teach" Angela words from the school readers. "She taught me the words each day as we played. She used to teach me words like 'dog' and 'cat' and some other words." When the girl went to high school Angela only saw her on the weekends "so I did not learn very much after that."

In her late teens Angela married and a few years later she and her husband moved into a large urban setting. Her husband "was good at getting and making deals - he was good at getting jobs in Spring, Summer and Winter. He didn't read or write either. His parents put him to work early, by the time he had time to go to school he felt he was too old." Angela found that "sometimes it was difficult not to know how to read. We never asked nobody before - our grandchildren read a little for us. They sometimes come around and help me with papers." Her daughter and son-in-law had limited English reading and writing skills.

Angela's husband had passed away several years prior to this study. It was a difficult time for Angela and her family. Angela and her husband were, at the time, living on a very limited income. When her husband passed away Angela had no insurance or other funds available for a funeral. It took over two weeks, even with assistance from several "connected friends," to obtain the funding for the funeral. It was a very trying time for all the family.

Angela had, for many years, been limited in her mobility requiring her to use a walker. With her limited income Angela could not afford the cost of a monthly Disabled Adult Transit System (DATS) bus pass. The Aboriginal seniors' centre that Angela belonged to provided transportation to and from the centre. She was also taken, along with other Aboriginal seniors,

to many seniors' activities; berry picking, pow-wow, concerts and Lac St. Anne gatherings. At home, Angela enjoyed watching the "soaps" and other television programmes that had a "happy story."

Shailey was a widowed 72 year old Métis women who spoke English, Cree and French. She lived in a Aboriginal seniors' complex. At the age of 8 years Shailey attended a school where all instruction was in English. Over the next two years she spent 10 months in school. Then her mother had her stay at home. Shailey helped her mother with home tasks for two years and then returned to school for four months. She was again taken back home to help her mother who, unbeknownst to Shailey, was about to give birth to "her new born brother." "I wanted to be back in school - I cried when I could not go back. We lived in the north of Alberta, there were no roads; in the summer we travelled by boat and in the winter we used the dog team. My brother was a joker. Sometimes he tipped me out of the sled and I had to run to catch up to them. We spoke Cree and French at home, we were a Métis family."

When Shailey was twenty years old she "was married and my husband and I went to the United States, so I had to teach myself to speak English too." Her husband passed away "many years ago." She, along with other Métis women, have been active for many years in maintaining the Cree language and Métis cultural activities. Shailey has been very involved with

her church translating many hymns into Cree. Over the years Shailey has taught Cree to a number of the church clergy.

Family is very important to her and she keeps in close touch by telephone and letters with family members scattered across Canada. She has often had "family members stay with me, but they can only stay for a few days. That's the rule in our apartment complex and sometimes I get so busy and have so many phone calls that I don't have time to just sit and think. That's why I check the telephone number [of an incoming call] before I answer it."

Shailey reads and writes Cree and English. However, she stated she did not feel that she knew English well enough to express herself in writing as she did not "know when or how to stop writing" nor did she know "how to use a dictionary" or to look-up "a number in the phone book."

Susie was a 64 year old women. She had attended grade one, for one year. After that year in school, her father kept her at home to "help him." Susie stayed on the family farm with her mother and father until her mother passed away. "I lived with my sister for a while. Then I moved out on my own and into this place."

Susie enjoys cooking for herself and "baking cookies for my friends." She watched television in the evening and preferred movies about animals. Susie was, what many would call a "homebody," however, she was active in several bowling

leagues. One bowling league arranged travel to other cities for bowling competitions. Susie has travelled to Texas to visit her sister and nephews. She is very focused on her family members enjoying the company of her sisters and brothers and her nieces and nephews and "chatting with them on the telephone." With only a limited "old age pension" income, Susie's brothers and sisters often arrange holiday time and special visits for her at their farms.

Selecting study sites. A major difficulty confronting some elderly urban Aboriginal people who are willing to attend literacy programmes is the availability and/or cost of transportation to and from their residences. During the initial discussions the participants were asked if they would prefer to work as a group in a culturally appropriate seniors' centre or in one-on-one sessions? All participants opted for the one-on-one sessions to take place in their homes. The participants expressed their reasons why they preferred having the sessions take place in their homes

> Shailey: "I went to the literacy centre for a while, it was not a safe area - it was not what I wanted. I like doing it here [in her home]." and, "I was confused at the learning centre. I could tell a story but I could not write. There was something missing - I don't know what it was."

Angela: "It's better in my place. I have a hard time getting in and out of the house" (Angela has physical mobility difficulties).

Susie: "Here [at her home] is better. Too many people in the [other literacy] class they bothered me."

Romeo: "It feels more comfortable when I learn to read in my own place."

The participants' comments reflect the Aboriginal approach to learning a new task; observe, practice in private and take time "until there is a conviction that the task can be performed perfectly" before entering the public arena (Ross, 1992, pp. 38-39). Having the learn-to-read-English project in the participants' homes gave them the freedom to select session times that suited their personal agendas. Another advantage was the ease of rescheduling their sessions to accommodate times of illness, family business or personal activities.

Study sessions. The study sessions began in January 2001 and ended in October 2001. The learn-to-read-English sessions were conducted on a one-on-one basis. Session times were negotiated with each participant to meet their personal schedules.

Romeo and Angela began their sessions in January ending in June. Susie joined the study in late March; her sessions went

through to June. Shailey became a study participant in April and her sessions continued to September.

Session times were set at a maximum of one to two hours bearing in mind that studies of the aged have indicated that their attention performances are lower than that of younger adults (Horn & Masunaga, 2000; Pratt & Norris, 1994; Rybash, Hoyer, & Roodin, 1986).

The sessions for Romeo and Angela were twice weekly, one to one and half hours per session. Their sessions totalled 39 hours and 38 hours respectively. Shailey's sessions were once a week for two hours for a total of 28 hours. Susie's sessions were once a week for one to two hours for a total of 26 hours.

During the learning session three approaches were employed: encouraging participants to critique the presentations, semistructured interviews, and, observing participants' reactions during the learning sessions (Kvale, 1996, p. 124).

b. how was respect for the participants incorporated in this study?

In order to create an authentic non-superficial relationship between each elderly Aboriginal participant and myself as the tutor I needed to clearly demonstrate my respect for the Aboriginal participant's need for a culturally comfortable learning environment, for guidance rather than coercion and for

sincere consideration of the interests and experiences of the Aboriginal participant.

Respecting the participants' decisions. In the first sessions I asked each participant if they could write. Angela stated that she always signed papers with an "X". Asked if she would like to write her initials in lieu of an "X" she said she would like to try. At the next session I gave Angela a plastic covered template of her initials written in large script, an erasable marker, and showed her the hand movements necessary to practice copying her initials. Her initial attempt was very difficult. After one week of trying on her own she said that "it was too hard" and gave up on any further attempts at writing her initials.

I asked Romeo if he could write his name and address. He said he could print his name, address and telephone number and sign his name. I watched him carefully working to print his name and address; it took him nearly two minutes after which he said he "did not need to write, I only want to learn to read." Susie could laboriously copy short words, and sign her name. However, when asked to write a word that was spoken, such as "man" or "cow," she was unable to write the words. Shailey, on the other hand, had "taught myself to write" and was very skilled at writing. She wrote notes of "every telephone conversation so I can remember what we talked about."

These responses to "testing of the waters" for the incorporation of writing in the sessions, clearly indicated that the learn-to-read-English process should first focus on reading. Respecting the wishes of Romeo, Angela and Susie, writing followed later in the process.

Consideration then was given to two aspects of adult literacy; first, as Knowles aptly demonstrated in the formulation of his andragogical theory, teaching young adults is qualitatively different from teaching older learners. Second, that the pace of instruction must be slow enough to encourage and accommodate participation. Setting aside the need for participants to acquire the skills to write allowed the learn-to-read-English process to move at a pace that suited each of the participants' learning rhythms.

Respecting the participants' learning styles. Most of the time people are not conscious of the cultural aspects that dominate their learning behaviour. It is only through the necessity of expressing ideas or notions orally, or in writing, that there may be perceived a culturally based, indoctrinated learning style. By having a learner's style exposed to a culturally alien educational setting it may be possible to discern the, sometimes almost imperceptible, characteristics that underlie an individual's culturally based learning style.

Learning style has been defined as an individual's way of processing information. The way of processing relates to an individual's consistently preferred way, or habitual pattern, of doing such things as learning, thinking or teaching. Embedded within an individual's processing is cognition, how an individual perceives, expresses her or himself, learns and thinks. How an individual processes information has been separated into "field dependent" and "field independent." The field independent person is seen as having the ability to orient himself or herself in a given environment while the field dependent ones rely on an external frame of reference (Jarvis & Woodrow, 2001; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001).

Studies of Australian Indigenous university students found their learning styles to be "wholist" and "imagers." A wholist learning style was exhibited by the Indigenous students who viewed learning as "something that occurred everyday and everywhere or that [it] occurred all the time" (Boulton-Lewis & Wilss, 2001, p. 113). Many Indigenous students were seen as wholist-imagers who tended to learn "best from concrete and readily visualized information" with practical, hands on, activities being the preferred way of learning (pp. 114-115).

Adult Natives in Rodriguez and Sawyer (1990) research provided some insight into the learning styles of adult Natives. One of their survey questions was "How do you learn best?" Their responses reflected the findings of Boulton-Lewis and

Wilss (2001) indicating the primacy of their experiential preferences:

> "watching and doing;" "you only need to see something once to learn it, you don't need to ask a lot of questions;" "the only way I ever knew, by watching and trying things out;" "I like when I can watch first and then when I do it, have someone there;" and, "watch and then have to try it on my own - its the only way to learn" (Rodriguez & Sawyer, 1990, p. 43).

Observing the elderly urban Aboriginal participants indicated their preferred learning was a wholist-imager style, that of watching and doing. The youthful backgrounds of the participants were as people of the prairie land, centred on or around farming communities. In our conversational discussions they all indicated that during their formative years learning their needed country-related, practical skills were done through "watching and trying", there was little or no formal learning:

Susie: "my Dad showed me how to drive the tractor;"

Romeo: "when I worked in the bush the boss showed me what to do and then I worked at it alone;"

Angela and Shailey had similar learning "watch and then try" experiences with their mothers as "teachers."

Respecting the participants' environment. Attention, focused concentration, as a concept refers to functions such as, alertness, span of consciousness, expectancy or preparedness (Rybash et al., 1986). Aging studies have found that older persons showed "no noticeable deficits in performing well-

practised skills" (p. 91). However, Yoon, May, and Hasher (1999) indicated that under some circumstances, non-optimal times, older persons may be distracted from an ongoing task and place more importance on what caused their distraction. Of the four participants Angela and Susie were the most easily distracted.

Angela's primary diversion was the afternoon "soap operas." She initially scheduled her learn-to-read-English sessions during a time when those programmes were playing. This conflict had come about when I suggested either an afternoon or morning session. Angela said she preferred "two on Thursday." During these sessions Angela would have the television on with the sound turned down while "trying" to follow a tutoring session. It became apparent that Angela had accepted, without question, my first suggested session time. This may have indicated that her personality type was what sociologists describe as "passive, somewhat dependent on others" (McPherson, 1983, p. 210). Over the next few sessions a "tutor to learner" rapport was established and Angela then ask for the session times to be changed to a time that accommodated her "soaps." Later, after resetting the session time Angela made the following statement "I want to learn to read!" That session was a turning point. At the next session I started by asking if she had had time to review the material from the previous sessions, she responded "I get through the book [session material] in one day."

Susie lived alone in her own apartment. The primary distraction during the tutoring sessions was her telephone. When the telephone rang Susie would answer and turn her attention to the caller. If the telephone interruption occurred in mid-session, that particular session would have to be terminated. For Susie a telephone call always took precedence over a tutoring session.

Shailey's telephone had the caller identification feature. When the telephone rang during a tutoring session Shailey would check the caller identification and would choose to answer or not. If she did answer she would tell the caller she would call back as she was "busy."

During all the sessions with Romeo there were no telephone calls; he was always attentive during the tutoring sessions.

I overcame other distracting elements within each participant's home by subtly suggesting rearranging seating positions. These adjusted "learning environment" arrangements worked well, most of the time. Additionally, I always telephoned the participants prior to a session to confirm if that particular session "was still on." Unlike Angela, Susie was quite independent and if she was "too busy to do literacy" she would state so and that session would be cancelled.

Having the learn-to-read-English sessions, at the participants' homes, versus a classroom setting, meant the tutoring "environment" was under their control. Therefore,

respecting their individual needs and wishes would sometimes mean forgoing or abbreviating a learning session:

> Susie: "if I don't feel like doing it [the session] I can tell you not to come."

Respecting the participants' need for guidance. Much of the focus on education for older persons is on those who have "overcome their hesitancy to enter" an educational institute (Brahce & Hunter, 1990, p. 288). Elderly Aboriginal people who chose to undertake new learning at an age when most people are inclined to let their "learning minds" rest usually did so with the encouragement and support of friends and or family members. Once engaged in a learning environment the preferred relationship between an Aboriginal learner and a teacher is one in which the teacher is accessible, approachable, available and shows "genuine, human caring" (Wilson, 1991, p. 311).

A teacher's relationship with older learning participants in a literacy programme must be, demonstrably, one of equals. Fitzgerald's (1984) survey of adult students found, in part, that they wanted a teacher that understood them, not as a professional, but as one "who lived like we do, she'd be more than a professional. She'd understand us and teach us the right things" (p. 27).

Respecting the Aboriginal participants' learning limitations requires the tutor to avoid being "teacher-like" and interact

more as a personal guide. There were times when a study participant appeared to lack interest in a session; at that time a session became a social event. Then the study session became a time for flexibility, to follow the lead of the learning participant into wherever his or her current interest took the session. These social transportations often brought out their personal concerns that became a significant part of future learning sessions:

> Romeo: "I don't want strangers to know I can't read - this way if I make a mistake no one laughs at me;"
> Angela: "I am slow so it's better this way - I don't feel out of place;"
> Shailey: "I like this way best - I like the visit."

Respecting the participants' dependence on others. An underlying and often unexpressed need of elderly learners may be for more independence, a "sense of place" within their urban community (Glendenning, 2001, p. 36). The backgrounds of the Aboriginal participants, including those participants who "dropped out," were similar. Their early educational experiences were limited, and their social, economic and cultural backgrounds did not promote or emphasise their need to know how to read or write.

The participants were asked how they coped in the urban setting with "bills and papers" that needed their attention?

They all said they had someone who helped them understand and read their bills and papers for them. Asked to specify who they depended on for such assistance their replies were:

Romeo: "My niece helps me fill out forms and sometimes my friend H... helps me;"

Angela: "My grandson reads me what the forms say and he writes out what is needed." Angela's daughter and husband lived with her, however they had limited reading and writing skills;

Susie: "My sister and my friend K---- does paper work for me when I need it done;"

Shailey: "I can read the forms but I asked Father J... or Father P... to help me with tax forms and some lawyer papers because some of the words I don't understand."

Romeo, Susie, and Shailey had each been living on their own for many years. Angela's husband had passed away several years prior to her participation in this study; listening to Angela speak of her husband then, and at other times, it became apparent that she had depended on him to make many decisions on their behalf.

A respectful relationship - tutor to participants. Literacy occurs in informal, formal or in a self-directed settings. Formal learning settings reflect an "instructor-designed" process; in contrast, informal, or self-directed learning, is associated with

"learner-centred" processes (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, pp. 43-44).

What had to be avoided in the learn-to-read-English sessions was a mainstream educational approach that was, or is, used by some older mainstream tutors whose educational backgrounds may have insulated them from the kind of lives that many elderly Aboriginal people have experienced. Furthermore, older mainstream tutors who, subscribing to empowerment and liberation as the means of deconstructing and reconstructing experiences, may fail to see the inappropriateness of such ideological notions for elderly Aboriginal learners. They may also fail to consider that a majority of Aboriginal people were never well-served by educational institutions.

Within the adult education philosophies of Lindeman, Bergevin, Knowles and Brookfield a dominant theme emerges; the relational equality between the adult learner and the adult tutor. Acceptance of relational, tutor to learner, equality may well bring forth experiences from which each can learn. However, such a relationship of equals exists only if the older Aboriginal learner and the tutor believe that their implied contract serves a common good. Maintaining an equal, valid and realistic learning contract involves shared learning and shared authority resulting in, it is hoped, a literacy process that meets the needs and interests of participating elderly Aboriginal people.

Research question 2: What were the motivations of the elderly urban Aboriginal participants:

a. who participated in the learn-to-read-English process?

Aboriginal learning is a state of experiencing one's world, past and present, from multiple contextual perspectives; status, activity, situation, experiences and culture (Hall, 1976, p. 87). When a literacy learner's experiences are contained within a learner controlled environment it may have a significant influencing factor in supporting and sustaining the learner's motivation. Thus, when elderly urban Aboriginal learners take on new experiences while they are in control of the learning process they decide how they want to engage the experiences. If they deem that the new learning experiences are worthy of their attention, and, having control over their learning environment, they may be more motivated to undertake new learning experiences.

It follows then that providing rewards and incentives may not be motivating factors for elderly Aboriginal learners; their motivations may be enabled when they see that they have an interest in, and can "personalise a task, either by learning materials that they have generated or by making certain choices over the task" (Perlmuter & Monty, 1989, p. 375). The personalised aspect contributing to the participants' motivations was their having an interest in certain choices and control over the learn-to-read-English process materials (p. 378).

Angela had been persuaded by several friends "who told me it would be good to join in and try it [learning to read English]." At first Angela just "went along," however, as the learning sessions progressed she became less passive, much more comfortable, more expressive and participative during the sessions. She began to form a relationship with the learning material.

Interest in a particular experience contributes to a self-actualisation or motivation. Romeo's motivation to learn to read was "so I can read about Louis Riel." His friend of many years, H---- added his encouragement telling Romeo he should "give learning to read a try."

Older persons who have been "involved in learning, education or retraining throughout the adult years" are more likely to enter a learning situation (McPherson, 1983, p. 202). Susie who had at one time attended a literacy programme participated in the learn-to-read English process as she wanted to "learn more about reading on my own." Shailey wanted to "speak and learn English better, I wish to look up big words (in a dictionary)." Susie and Shailey may be considered as self-motivated in part because of their prior experiences with formal literacy programmes.

The motives expressed by the participants centred on the themes of reading about a historical figure or on an opportunity to regain what was missed in their younger years. Some may

have viewed themselves as non-learners, while others may have seen their participation in this literacy process as an opportunity to recover their "sense of discovery ...of unrealized potential and not one of 'de facto' limitation" (McClusky, 1970a, p. 91). Participating in the literacy process may also, for some participants, have provided social contacts that ameliorated feelings of uselessness, boredom or isolation (Fales, MacKeracher, & Vigoda, 1981).

b. of those who expressed an interest in the learn-to-read-English process but did not participate, why did they not participate?

A barrier to participation in a literacy programme may centre on a lack of educational experiences or memories of bad educational experiences. Lack of educational experiences may cause some older persons to perceive themselves as poor learners and "avoid situations in which [they would] be required to learn" (Fales et al., 1981, p. 47).

The non-participants lived independently in their own accommodations. And, although somewhat slowed by age, they were both active and had a wide circle of family and friends. They indicated that they were less concerned with adding an additional outside activity and more concerned about focusing on their own family situations.

Research Question 3: How well, in the views of the elderly urban Aboriginal participants, had the following literacy components stimulated their learning:

a. the "visual" component?

The learn-to-read-English process brought together English letters with mnemonic images. The images were such that study participants could associate them with everyday objects or situations.

Mnemonic images were in colour; the use of mnemonic images were designed to facilitate the decoding of letter sounds only; they were not designed to replicate "words" within text (McDaniel & Waddill, 1994). The mnemonic images for this study were initially selected randomly. However, through usage by, and in consultation with the study participants, mnemonic images were re-selected, modified or changed as necessary. The changes reflected participants' prior knowledge and so allowed "for easier and better integration of new information" (Hartley, 1989, p. 143). Furthermore, the mnemonic images were not so complicated as to require participants to "learn how to elaborate on the processing of key elements of the mnemonic" or to require extensive training that could be "anxiety-provoking for the elderly, thereby diminishing their potential effectiveness" (Yesavage et al., 1989, pp. 600-601).

Romeo: "The pictures and the letters help me remember the sound;" "using just words with no picture is kinda hard;" "without pictures I was just guessing."

Angela: "I like both of them together [letters and pictures]. I have been studying them for quite a bit;" "pictures and letters were good;" "I like both the letters and pictures."

Susie: "The pictures and letters were good;" "pictures help me remember the [letter] sounds."

Shailey: "I can read the words okay. It helps me remember what some of the words I don't remember seeing sound like;" "sometimes I forget the sound of the letter and I try to find it in the [work] book."

McDaniel and Waddill's (1994) study of recall using pictures in text concluded, in part, that mnemonic "illustrations improved recall for low prior-knowledge learners but not for high prior-knowledge learners" (p. 178). There was no expectation that the use of mnemonic devices would provide a basis for full recall, "it takes many exposures to a word before it becomes a known sight word" (Ekwall, 1976, p. 110).

Romeo, a low prior-knowledge learner, initially had difficulty in reading aloud words that began with the letter "n." He had only to be reminded of the "lady in black" and would pronounce the letter correctly. The lady in black was an image

of a Nun, one of several mnemonic images used with the letter "n." In later sessions he had no difficulty with words beginning with the letter "n."

Letters in colour. It has been said that reading instruction is "more of an art than a science" (Mazurkiewicz, 1976, p. 7). The study participants could speak English and could, even those with a slight hearing loss, discriminate between words that sounded alike when the words were used within supporting contexts. For example, "I will *buy* that" and " I will be *by* soon."

Visual discrimination, "the ability to differentiate between visual symbols," printed letters that represent specific sounds, requires a more artful approach (p.113). The first section of the learn-to-read-English focused on representing single sound letters, both consonants and vowels, in association with mnemonic images.

Within word lists, the use of colour (King, 1997) with vowel letters emphasised their special importance in the formation and pronunciation of target words. The use of colour also separated, in the target words, consonants from vowels.

The use of a specified colour for a vowel letter within a word to indicate it is silent, not to be sounded, may serve to simplify the reader's task in sounding the word correctly (Bentley, 1967; Hoyer, 1990). Colour may aid the learner as

"vowels have sounds of their own. . . . However, consonants have no sound of their own and only have names" (Gattegno, 1962, p. 6):

> Romeo: "the shush man's [mnemonic for silent vowel] letters in green were good."
>
> Angela: "I like the letters [in colour] they helped me."
>
> Susie: "they were OK, I like colour."

b. the "experiential" component?

Investigations of age-related changes in "the three dominant strands of cognition: processing, knowing and thinking" suggests that older persons relative to younger adults, may "be considered to be living in a functionally different environment" (Rybash et al., 1986, pp. ix, 87). Rybash et al. are, of course, stating the obvious, the environment of many older persons is usually one in which they "are covertly if not overtly engaged" in their personal survival struggles to devise the means to recover from "actual losses . . . or anticipated losses or both" (McClusky, 1970b, p. 1).

The relationship between a learner's conception of an experience and the environment in which it occurred is a complex one. How do past experiences predispose a learner to react, or behave, in ways that may be considered different? Because of past experiences a learner, in a learning situation, may be expected to have a level of expectancy and preparedness.

Romeo, in reading sentences, sometimes anticipated what the next word should be before reading it. For example, the sentence "The car is in the barn," Romeo read it as "The car is in the *garage*." Anticipating a word in a sentence that appears to relate to an individual's previous experience, or known oral expressions, may indicate that the individual is recalling from memory similar action or actions. The individual may be relying more on "what they know" (Hess, 1990, p. 100), reflecting on experience "with little attention to the text" (Norman, Malicky, & Fagan, 1988, p. 20).

These aspects and the study participants' prior knowledge mediated between the stories and the anticipated outcomes. For example, the story, "Who went to town, the Owl or the Clown?" was assembled to emphasise several phonics sounds. The story was incomplete, it had no ending, there was no indication of who went to, or reached, town.

For the participants, storytelling in their early Aboriginal learning environment, was bound up with wisdom, timelines, preferred behaviours and multilevels of meaning that became evident to listeners as they aged. The participants' experience with storytelling was, from a wholist-imager perspective, that a story had to have completeness, a satisfactory ending (Gilliland, 1995, p. 81).

Research question 4: What were the views expressed by the elderly urban Aboriginal participants as related to:

a. their experiences with this study?

The emphasis of this study was established, in part, on engaging the Aboriginal learners in the learn-to-read-English process. Norman et al. (1988) stated that the goals and needs of adults are best met when there is a "teacher-learner" participation within which the adult learner assumes a greater role in decision making and programme planning (p. 25).

Participation reflects the, sometimes forgotten, realisation that learning is a social phenomenon. All learning should be seen as being produced through mutual "participation in interesting activities, not by panegyrics" (Smith, 1989, p. 355).

This study found that when the participants were treated as equals and encouraged to provide their critical comments they became more actively involved in the literacy process.

On session locations. At the beginning of the study the participants were asked if they knew of literacy programmes and if they had enrolled in one why did they not stay there?

Susie: "I like it better in my place" and "in class they [other students] would want to know my business."

Romeo: had heard about them, however, "I like to work in my own place" and "someone's always watching, when I worked in the trees I was by myself."

Shailey: "I did go to a literacy place downtown but when they found out I spoke Cree some of the young students wanted me to tell them what some words in English were in Cree. I think they were university students. They only wanted to learn big words and put them into Cree. I didn't understand the big words and I quit going."

Angela: had not attended a literacy programme. She had heard about others who did and said she would feel "more comfortable in my own place." Angela had to use a walker and needed someone to take her out to various appointments and to the seniors' centre.

Their responses reflected their need to feel "comfortable," "safe" and in control of their learning environment. Thus their initial desire was for the learn-to-read-English process to be conducted in the "comfortable and safe environment" of their residences.

The participants' comments also mirror the findings of Rodriguez and Sawyer's (1990) research report on Native literacy. Some of their potential Native literacy learners comments were:

on their preferred learning situation;

"I would prefer tutoring, don't like to be singled out,"

"tutoring... the tutor has to be patient" (p. 40),

on place of learning;

some indicated a "strong preference for on-reserve or in-home situations" (p. 44),

on participation barriers;

"the only way I could learn to read and write is through home schooling, with someone I'm comfortable with,"

"there is no appropriate program" (p. 44).

Romeo, Angela, and Shailey knew each other as they were members of the same seniors' centre. As the tutoring sessions progressed they would inquire as to how the others were doing. This inquiring camaraderie led to their indicating that in a culturally appropriate setting they would not mind their group participating in group learning sessions. Several computer assisted writing sessions were conducted in their Aboriginal seniors' centre, a culturally appropriate setting.

Susie knew of the other participants through our conversations during tutoring sessions. She preferred to remain with one-on-one tutoring.

<u>On reading and stories</u>. Reading is a multifaceted four step basic process; word recognition, comprehension, reaction and assimilation. Word recognition is the decoding of printed symbols; comprehension is the understanding what words "say" and their assembled "meaning," the relationship of words and ideas. Reaction is the validating of what is written in accompaniment with the learning reader's experiences;

assimilation is the learner's incorporating what he or she knows with new word experiences gaining expanded understandings (Bowren & Zintz, 1977, pp. 72-75). The cognitive aspects of reading, as classified by Barrett (1967), are; literal meaning, evaluation, inference and appreciation (in Ekwall, 1976, p. 54).

> Romeo: "Without knowing how to read you can't find out what some words mean." He read a new word in a sentence and three lines later the word appeared again, he did not remember the word.
>
> Susie: "Sometimes the words are hard." At times she had difficulty in recalling the sound of some of the letters in a word.
>
> Angela: "When the words are (related to some action) they're easier to remember."

The sessions following the Owl and Clown story were on decoding pronunciation, silent consonants and syllabication. Over the period of the last sessions I used the story "Tom and Jerry, The Astro-nots" (Johnston, 1969) for reading and comprehension practice. As the Tom and Jerry story progressed Romeo and Angela again asked what had happened, in the earlier short story, to the Owl and Clown.

On stories: Romeo said he needed "more stories about Jerry the mouse, [and] Jerry getting the girl;" Angela liked the story

and "the pictures, only Tom did not have a very nice looking nurse."

At the second reading session Romeo asked, "what happened to the owl and the clown. Did they get to town?" When Angela and Susie were told of Romeo's question about the fate of the owl and the clown, they too expressed an interest in knowing what had happened to them.

The "Astro-nots" story was originally set to be about the two main characters, Tom and Jerry. To the ending of the "Astro-nots" story was added the owl and the clown characters giving the participants a conclusion that fulfilled their need for a satisfactory story ending.

These stories were developed as complements to the phonics tutoring sessions. However, the participants wanted endings to the two stories. Angela, Romeo and Susie, following the phonics sessions, indicated a preference for stories as a means of learning to read. The final story was used for emphasising three aspects of reading; word meaning, phrase meaning and comprehension of longer sentences.

On Spelling. On completing a phonics module the participants were asked to orally spell spoken sample words. Upon completion of the last phonics module three participants, Romeo, Angela and Susie, were asked during one-on-one sessions, to orally spell selected words. Three and four letter

words, such as bed, dog, bend, long, were, with minor prompting, spelled correctly. Several words with greater syllabication were also presented orally. The following are a few recorded samples;

Romeo, when asked to spell "Catholic" he responded with "k-o," pause then "k-a-o- l-e-c," missing the "th" sound. When asked to spell the word "native," responded with "n-a-t-e-v."

Angela, asked to spell the word "picture," spelled it correctly. Later that same session Angela was asked to spell the word again and said she could only remember the first three letters "p-i-c" and then said she was "tired."

Susie was asked to spell the words in the following phrase, "big bad wolf." As she spelled the words I typed them on the laptop computer. This was done in part because it was sometimes difficult to understand her as she spoke softly. Susie spelled "big" and "bad" correctly and spelled "wolf" as "w-o-l-g."

Shailey had no difficulty in spelling words that she "knew." She often heard words spoken, either in news broadcasts or at meetings, that she did not understand. At the study sessions she would say a word the she had heard and wanted to know what it meant. For example, she was involved in a special choir and the word "a cappella" was used by the choir master. She did not want to ask the choirmaster the meaning of the word as she did not want to "appear stupid." Shailey's spelling review centred

on words that she had heard used but had not seen in print. Using the phonics technique she was able to spell most of the words correctly.

On Writing. The lack of three of the participants' writing skills was taken into consideration when the learn-to-read-English process was undertaken. Near the end of this study, writing by the participants, was done using a specially modified computer keyboard[11] (Appendix B).

Romeo and Shailey had expressed their desire to write using a computer. Romeo said that he wanted "a computer to learn to write." Asked why he wanted to learn to write, Romeo said "I want to write to my friends and to play a few games." Romeo had, at his seniors' centre, often observed and watched centre administrators working with their computers:

> "Seems like every place I go I see computers. I wonder what they are doing - besides playing games. They say they work hard. I can't see what makes it [work] hard. I need to learn to see how it is hard. Then maybe I can help H--- [a friend]."

Shailey had taught herself to read and write English. She stated that her reason for participating in the learn-to-read-English process was to "speak and learn more English." During

[11] "Survey and interview responses pointed out that for most older adults, standard equipment is sufficient, but for some, attention should be given to: a) monitor size and lighting; b) special keyboard design; c) mouse design; d) quality of print; e) desk size and colour (conducive to the eyes of seniors); f) disabled access; and g) quality of seating" King (1997).

the first visit to Shailey's home she received a phone call. While talking on the telephone Shailey was writing on a scrap piece of paper. When the telephone conversation was finished Shailey explained whenever someone called her she would write notes as to what the conversation was about. Shailey brought out a sheaf of papers which she said that she had written during other telephone calls. Asked why she did this she said "I write to remember."

When it was pointed out that Shailey did speak and write English quite well, why did she want to participate in the learn-to-read-English process? "I want to look up big words [in a dictionary]." When asked where her dictionary was, she said that she did not have one. At the next session I gave her a dictionary.

Shailey had been given a computer and she wanted to know how to use it. She wanted to use it to type out a Cree hymn book. She, and a close friend, had translated many hymns into Cree and Shailey wanted to use a computer "to write them because I only have one copy of the hymns, its getting worn out." When asked why she did not have someone do it for her she said, "if they don't know Cree they may make wrong words."

In the early phases of this study all participants were given an opportunity to use a standard external keyboard attached to the laptop computer. Although both Romeo and Shailey had expressed their interest in using a computer they both

demonstrated a reluctance to use the computer keyboard. Asked why, Romeo said that he "was afraid to break it." Shailey, Angela, and Susie all found the standard key board intimidating.

The alpha-keyboard was introduced at the end of the study. All participants tried it, first in their home and then as a group at an Aboriginal seniors' centre. They were far less hesitant to use this keyboard than the regular keyboard. One reason was, as Angela remarked, "the letters were easy to see" and Shailey said, "the buttons [keys] were big. I liked the large buttons they were easy to see and use."

The letters of the alpha keyboard were arranged in three rows in the standard alphabetic order:

first row, A B C D E F G H I,

second row, J K L M N O P Q,

third row, R S T U V W X Y Z.

The participants use of the alpha keyboard highlighted the need to focus on learning the alphabet sequence.

<u>On the English alphabet and visual discrimination</u>.

Observing the participants using the keyboard revealed a significant gap in the learn-to-read-English process, a taken for granted knowledge of the alphabetic sequence. All participants, after selecting the first letter of a word they were "writing" had difficulty in "locating" the next required letter for that word. Furthermore, they had some difficulty in visually discriminating

between similar letters for example, a "B" from a "D", a "Q" from a "O" or an "M" from an "N". Consideration should also have been given to auditory discrimination. Combining reading and recitation of the alphabet sequence could improve visual and auditory discrimination (Dallmann, Rouch, Chang, & Deboer, 1974).

The need to practice, orally and visually, the alphabet sequence is illustrated by Shailey's encounter with alphabet sequenced materials. Although Shailey was proficient in the reading and writing of English she was unable to "look up words" in a dictionary: In discussing the process of finding words in a dictionary Shailey said:

> "When I hear a word I don't know I can't look it up in a dictionary because I am not sure of the spelling, I don't know what the first letter is. Father J--- said I sang 'a cappella' but I can't spell it. . . . I have the same problem with my telephone book. They gave me a new telephone book and threw out the old one. I had all the pages marked that had the telephone numbers I needed. Now I can't look up the numbers of people I know."

Shailey was an accomplished singer however, she had difficulty "locating her part" in a music score which had all the singing parts for soloists and a choir. Shailey had a solo part in a music presentation that was being televised around the world.

Her prior public singing was done either as a soloist or with a partner, often a cappella, and she did not use a music score. She was reluctant to approach the music director in charge of the production. It took me several sessions to explain to her and have her understand how to separate, read and select her singing part of the music score from the other soloists and choir members' parts of the musical score.

The learn-to-read-English process did include pages with alphabetic upper and lower case letters. The initial emphasis of the literacy process was on sound, it was only when the writing component was introduced that knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the alphabet sequence became a factor.

Although learning the alphabet sequence has to be accomplished at some point in a literacy process, older adult learners are more likely to be interested in just getting "on with the business of learning words and sentences" (Bowren & Zintz, 1977, p.119).

On conversations and the electronic blackboard. In the early phases of the learn-to-read-English process the focus was on the sound of individual letters. The individual letters were attached to words and accompanying mnemonic images. Isolating a sound and a word without placing the words into meaningful sentences fails the relevancy test. However, the relevancy test was

monitored through conversation and observation of a learner's individual expressions and body language.

An observer will also learn to recognise signs that indicate a learner has reached a point in an instruction period when his or her interest is waning. Depending on the particular learner this may occur within the first 15 to 20 minutes of an instruction hour. It has been found that the "length of attention span and the way it is utilised is different for each person" (Bowren & Zintz, 1977, p. 284). It is then time to turn from instructive learning to conversational learning.

Conversations provided the basis for introducing additional words and phrases that the learner used during "social exchanges." Social exchanges became a part of the learning sessions with the participants instigating conversations about things that had happened to them from the time of the last learning session. These conversational moments were used to introduce, spell out for them, words they had heard such as; apartment, lodge, hospital, application, billing date, catholic and so on. The laptop computer was used as an "electronic blackboard" to create sentences with the new and newly learned words.

Use of the laptop computer as a blackboard encouraged participants to provide other words that, from their experiences, had the "new sounds." These words were then incorporated in

sentences written on the computer as a means of reinforcing the new sounds.

In later sessions the use of homographs such as live, live, lead, lead were also used in sentences made up on computer. This approach, writing and displaying whole sentences on the computer, emphasised to the participants the need to read a complete sentence in order to be able to comprehend the information therein contained.

> Romeo: "It's easier to know the words when they are in with other words [sentences];"
>
> Angela: "its better to read [words] in stories;"
>
> Shailey: "Without knowing how to read [a sentence] you can't find out what some words mean."

Although Shailey could read and write English she said that "when I write something down I don't know where to stop." Asked what she meant by this, she said "I don't understand how to use the marks [punctuation]." Lacking the ability to use punctuation, Heilman (1967) states, "appears with surprising frequency among impaired readers" (p. 211).

With Shailey dictating an introduction she was to make at a meeting, I typed her remarks into the laptop computer. Ar the next session, I gave her a printed copy of her remarks. This allowed for a review of the text with Shailey and explanations of how and why various punctuation marks were used.

b. their perceived level of reading achievement within the study's prescribed time frame?

Follow-up sessions. The follow-up sessions were carried out during the period August to October 2001. I met with Susie in August, with Shailey in September and with Romeo in October; the follow-up sessions had to take into account their social commitments. During the period from August onward, Angela was in ill health. I did visit Angela several times during that period but it was quite apparent that she was not well enough for any follow-up sessions.

A word recognition review, sight word list, was conducted using 80 words selected from various pages of the learn-to-read-English workbook. The selected words were not placed in sentences or accompanied by visual or mnemonic images nor were they grouped to facilitate "configuration clues" (Dallmann et al., 1974, p. 113).

Susie was asked to speak aloud each word she recognised. As she spoke the words she knew she was asked to explain the basis for her knowledge of the recognised words. She correctly recognised 23 of the 80 words.

Susie said that she related the words she recognised to things her "experiences"; as seen in the following words she correctly recognised:

ham "sometimes I buy ham,"
milk "I always buy milk for my porridge,"
pup "I had a dog on the farm,"

sun "because the sun is in the sky - making everything hot,"
jet "flies in the sky - jets do the white marks in the sky,"
bus "because I ride a bus all the time - some days I take the bus to see Pete and Diana,"
bed "I sleep in it. No bed and I'd have to sleep on a chair,"
dad "I think of my own daddy. I helped him haul in the hay. I drove a tractor for him. My daddy wanted me to drive the tractor - never the combine - just the tractor,"
red "I have clothes that are red - I have red shorts on,"
kick "cause you kick a football,"
box "sometimes put dishes in a box,"
pig "cause we raised pigs on the farm,"
the "I just know it,"
dog "we raised a dog on the farm. I always fed them,"
dolly "I played with dolls - my brother broke my doll,"
door "cause you go out and in a door,"
brown "of brown clothes,"
cow "I milked cows,"
cat "I raised cats,"
Roy "he was my friend,"
four "that's what you count."

Shailey was asked to comment on what she found useful for her in the study's literacy process. She found the "pictures and letters good" as it helped her to "figure out" some words she had read but did not understand how they were spoken. When she attended her various organisations she had found that "in-depth questions are hard for me to answer - I want to do it [the answer] my way so I understand myself." Referring to the dictionary, Shailey said that "without knowing how to read you can't find out what some words mean." She again made a comment on her experience with a learning centre; "I was

confused at the centre. I could tell a story but I couldn't write it."

Her final comment was that the learning centre "was not what I wanted. I like the way you are doing it [tutoring in her home]."

During the follow-up with Shailey she commented that she did not like people to just "drop in." She enjoyed having people come to visit but only if they had called to see if it was a "good time" to visit. This brings out, again, that a literacy process in a participant's home is also a social contact. The focus of this study was on learning to read English, however, providing the sessions in the homes of the participants was a "social call." In every social relationship there are certain expectations that "provide the basis on which actual relationships development . . . [such as providing] intellectual and sensory stimulation" (Fales, et al., 1981, pp. 28-29).

Romeo correctly identified 14 words from the sight word list. He modified seven of the listed words. The words Romeo correctly identified were:

hat, man, milk, sun, wolf, jet, box, bed, ten, beg, tax, fox and truck.

Five of the modified words were; pup as puppy, ran as run, bet as boat, mad as made and pig as big.

Two of the missed words were clearly misread; "net" as "soon" and "hen" as "miss."

Romeo was asked what it was that helped him to recognise particular words from the sight word review list. He said that he "just knew the word." There was no attempt to illicit any additional information as to the reason for his word recognition. However, he said that he read the word "net" as "soon" because it made him think of the word as "next." He spoke the word "hen" as "her" and he thought of the word "miss." These two examples of Romeo's replacement of some words were sometimes seen in his reading of the work book stories. In one short story he replaced the word "mouse" with "Métis" in the sentence "the first trip to the moon would be made by a mouse." In another story the sentence was "took the fancy toy car to the city" he replaced the word "city" with the word "garage;" earlier in the study when he read the sentence "the car is in the barn" he had replaced "barn" with the "garage." These examples appear to indicate a recall of his experiences in which the replacement words were what he expected, or guessed, the words should be.

At the beginning of this literacy project the observed participation levels of Romeo and Angela were similar. Neither had had any experiences with literacy classes. And, even though they did not question how the "learn-to-read-English" process would teach them to read, they actively considered the cultural appropriateness of the mnemonic images. Susie had attended literacy classes and brought out the material with which she had worked. She showed a marked interest in comparing her

previous material with the learn-to-read-English process material.

Shailey could read and write and had briefly attended a literacy centre. However, she said that the mainstream literacy centre did not help her "to speak and learn good English, it was better doing it in my place."

Phonics Workbook - Final Version.

Upon completion of the follow-up sessions the final version of the phonics workbook was recorded on a computer disc (Appendix D). At the outset of this study the participants were given two roles: literacy learners and research participants. The following areas reflect their, not insignificant, observations, discussions and determinations; appropriate mnemonic images, use of colour, stories and print sizes.

I had established the workbook's phonics modules sequence prior to engaging the elderly Aboriginal participants in this study. However, throughout this study I treated the mnemonic images as works in progress. The primary revisions to the phonics modules centred on the appropriateness of the mnemonic images. As each phonics module and related mnemonic images were presented to, and worked through by, the participants, their non-verbal and explicit verbal reactions were noted. When a mnemonic image did not clearly reflect their individual experience levels it was replaced with a more appropriate image.

The revised phonics modules and mnemonic images were then presented at the following learning session. When the participants agreed that the revised phonics modules and accompanying mnemonic images were appropriate, the amended workbook pages were added to the literacy workbooks.

The use of coloured letters, as an aid in the interpretation and perception of voiced and voiceless letters, was found by the participants to be a useful strategy in aiding them in the recognition and sounding out the appropriate vowel in paired vowel words. As well, Romeo and Angela found that the addition of the image of "the hush man" and that of "the shouting man" aided them in differentiating the sounded vowel from the silent vowel.

The brief story, "Who went to town, the Owl or the Clown," and "The Astro-nots" became an integral part of the phonics workbook. As the participants' word recognition increased, sentences with known words and new words were "written" on the lap-top blackboard. From these blackboard sessions the Owl and Clown story was added to the workbook. During the sessions that followed Romeo, Angela and Susie asked for a conclusion to the Owl and Clown story; in developing the "Astro-nots" story an ending for the characters in the Owl and Clown story was incorporated in the final version of the "Astro-nots" story. Then the "Astro-nots" story had, for the participants, a satisfactory ending reflecting one Aboriginal

learning legacy, in this case the need for supportive relationships (Tafoya, 1995; White & Archibald, 1992; Wilson, 1994).

The first phonics modules workbook pages were done in the standard 12 point font size and presented to the participants at the first learning sessions. The mnemonic images had, perforce, to be large enough to be readily decipherable. At her first session Angela, who had some vision impairment, when asked about having larger print thought that "larger would be better" for her. The other participants indicated that they did not require larger print; however, the use of a larger font had an unexpected value. In later discussions with the other participants, they all found that the larger letters and mnemonic images were "easier to learn with" because there was not "as much stuff" on each workbook page.

Summary

This chapter described how relationship, respect and understanding may, for elderly urban Aboriginal participants, create an atmosphere of caring, sharing and learning in a literacy process. The study's Aboriginal participants exhibited a range of experiences with and reactions to the phonics presentations of letters, words, sentences, stories and the use of colour highlighting. Their interpretations, suggestions and

approaches to the literacy process ensured that it was, for them, culturally appropriate.

To paraphrase Moody (1985):

> If [elderly urban Aboriginal people] are "the elders of the tribe," then as an interest group, they have the potential of recognizing interests that transcend any single generation. If we educate [elderly Aboriginal people] for new roles and activities, it must be based on acceptance of the limitations of time, and it must include the selfless striving of preparation for future generations or creation of conditions for social justice in a world [they] will never live to see. To acknowledge our own finitude and death and still to strive for social change is already recognition of the dimension of transcendence. (pp. 36-37)

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the significant findings of the study regarding the learning approaches and elements that contributed to comfortable learning situations for the elderly urban Aboriginal participants.

Learning Approaches

In this study there were elderly Aboriginal participants who were persuaded to "give it [literacy] a try" and others who had specific personal reasons for engaging in a literacy process. However, they participated in this literacy process only when they felt that, for each of them, the time was right; "that is, when the whole array of environmental factors converge to ensure success" (Brant, 1990, p. 536). When older Aboriginal people find the time to be right it is incumbent on those who would wish to draw them into a literacy process to understand what they consider makes them feel comfortable in a learning situation.

The analysis of the findings identified elements that supported the elderly urban Aboriginal participants engagement in this study's literacy process.

Three Levels of Analysis

The analyses of supporting elements are examined on three levels: what did the participants bring to the study; what supports did the participants need; and, what more did the participants want?

What did the participants bring to the study?

Three elements were identified that influenced elderly Aboriginal participants engagement with the literacy process, independence, experiences and ownership.

Independence

When the elderly Aboriginal participants engaged in this literacy process they did not necessarily regard it as a significant personal need. The participants indicated that few, if any, elderly Aboriginal people would take part in a mainstream literacy process that was based on literacy goals that were "a form of social intervention that often begins with a problem that needs to be solved" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 75).

Those who would present literacy programmes for elderly Aboriginal people need to be aware of a subtle characteristic of Aboriginal people that is often overlooked; independence. Independence is not unique to elderly Aboriginal people,

however, it may influence their decision to participate, or not, in a learning process.

Mucha (1984) described some of the characteristics he found to be common to North American Aboriginal people, for example, "generosity and the stress on sharing; dislike for antagonising other people and for interfering with other people's business" (p.330). Four of the study's elderly Aboriginal participants were persuaded by family members or close friends to engage in this study's literacy learning process. However, two of them may not have wanted to let their family or their friend feel that their advice was not welcome, and initially agreed to their requests. An elderly Aboriginal person might show appreciation and respect for advice from a friend or relative by indicating agreement through a slight nod or perhaps by saying "as you say."

A persuading discussion may often be one-sided with the family or friend doing most, or all, of the talking. In such interpersonal relations, the family or friend would see their interactions as suggestions with no hint of coercion. An elderly Aboriginal person may agree with their suggestion because he or she does not wish to engage in a discussion in a manner that might give the family or friend the impression that their suggestion was not welcome. The way of agreeing to the suggestion, but not necessarily following through on it, is to find a plausible reason that leaves everyone satisfied. What may

be termed as relation saving excuses are, for example, the need to meet some personal or family obligation before engaging in a new task. The family or friend will not usually pursue the matter further but consider that they have planted a seed and await its growth.

Some elderly Aboriginal women may engage in a literacy process only if it is culturally sensitive to the learning and peer tutor role assignments that were, and for some still are, found in Aboriginal cultures wherein women take the role of teachers. It is likely that this study's "shy" woman's decision not to participate in the literacy process may, although it was not stated, have turned on the issue of tutor gender.

The independent nature's of the elderly Aboriginal participants was, and is seen in several examples of their personal comments. Shailey said she learned English on her own when she lived in the United States; furthermore, she taught herself to write English. Susie and Shailey found their situations with mainstream literacy programme as places where the other participants wanted to know their personal "business". Romeo did not mind that his Aboriginal friends knew he could not read, but he did not want other, non-Aboriginal, people in his seniors' housing to know that he could not read English.

In a later follow-up conversation with Angela I found that a very close member of her family had passed away, and although she was now permanently confined to a wheelchair and qualified

for a assisted living accommodation she prefers to stay "in my own place." With some assistance from her grandson, she lived independently in a non-seniors' apartment complex.

Experiences

Should a participant's lived experiences be a part of a literacy process? Elderly Aboriginal people have moved through many different lived contexts and have, over time, developed a range of survival skills and knowledge. And, as Medicine (1995) proclaimed, Aboriginal people have had, and continue to have, the strength to work and learn in the mainstream society without losing their identity or forgetting their "cultural roots and the Native community" (p. 45).

Lindeman promoted the idea that experience rather than traditional subject based learning was an essential approach for adult literacy (Brookfield, 1987). Moody (1990) took Lindeman's approach much further; older persons life experiences should be used in a learning process to "elicit new understanding of what is already present in the learners" (p. 30). There are literacy programmes for older people that encourage them to write of their life experiences as a "means of coming to peace with their past and as a way to cope with present circumstances" (Schuster, 1999, p. 231).

Lived experiences of elderly Aboriginal people may, with care, be melded into learning situations. However, as in this

study's literacy approach, learning for older persoans may best be done with the accent on making the process as enjoyable as possible. Therefore, in this study no attempt was made to incorporate the participants' lived experiences into the study's stories. Rather, the material used sentences, short stories and a final story, that were by design, of a humorous nature.

Ownership

Those literacy programmes that do encourage and use the stories of the participants, in particular Aboriginal persons, should consider the element of ownership. Literacy for elderly urban Aboriginal people can best be fostered within a cultural context in which they take possession of, or have a shared ownership in, the learning process.

Mainstream formal literacy processes are vested in bureaucratic organisations that are "placed above everything else" (Hall, 1976, p. 209). Bureaucratic ownership of literacy situations often engages older learners in a "tautly constructed [system of] teacher manuals and curriculum" of guided learning that does not reflect their experiences (Smith, 1989, p. 356).

The oft used approach of having elderly Aboriginal learners personal histories and experiences incorporated into a literacy process has to, even with a learner's permission, be done with respect and confidentiality. Even though there are literacy teachers, mainstream and Aboriginal, who encourage the

inclusion of such personal histories which they see as "both culturally appropriate and age sensitive" (University of Regina, 1996, p. 29), personal stories[12] and experiences must remain the property of the Aboriginal learner. "This means that no one has the right to share another person's personal [experiences] unless permission is asked for and given," (p. 12) and, such permission should not be seen as allowing unlimited distribution of the personal histories of Aboriginal literacy participants.

What supports did the participants need?

Elements that were seen to support the elderly Aboriginal participants engagement with the literacy process were as follows: flexibility, social interactions and peer tutors.

Flexibility

When an elderly Aboriginal learner has the option to do, or not do, a literacy session it supports and respects the learner's need for control over his or her learning time. Another measure of a flexible learning approach is how well it respects the cultural value of when the time is right.

A flexible approach should not bring in mainstream norms of scheduling specific times for learning; that is not to say that the initial setting of learning times should not be negotiated with

[12] Smith (1999) emphasises that researchers of indigenous cultures bear in mind that "the story teller rather than the researcher retains control. ... story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves" (p. 145).

elderly Aboriginal participants. What is needed is an awareness that all prior agreed to learning times may be subject to change. An elderly participant may put off a learning session because he or she may be "too busy" or does not "feel like doing it today."

Although such interruptions in the flow of literacy learning presentations may be seen as a loss of momentum, it may reflect the need for an elderly participant to take a time-out; "time and timing are an important consideration since one needs time to learn, to change, to heal and to grow" (Malcolm Saulis quoted in Graveline, 1998, p. 140).

Social interactions

The learning environment needs to be one that is comfortable and caring, one in which elderly participants are given an opportunity to add to their knowledge of the present and the potential to engage in new experiences.

The study's participants indicated that they were uncomfortable in mainstream literacy classes as they felt they were, or would have been, subjected to unwanted intrusions into their personal lives. Having a literacy process in the home of an Aboriginal participant fulfils the need for the elderly learner to follow the cultural sensitivity of practising in private before performing in public.

A literacy process that takes place in an Aboriginal participant's home is in an environment that is under the control

of the learner. On some occasions the learner may bring out some printed matter such as a letter or community notice that they want to have read to them. Depending on the contents the discussion or review of the material may take up the time allotted for the literacy session. At other times the learning time may involve a conversation about some news topic or television show that the learner had seen. Social interactions, depending on the time available, may allow the tutor to use common expressions or words from the learner's letters, notices or television show as a spontaneous learning moment.

Social interactions may also be a time when elderly Aboriginal participants only wish to reminisce about their past. Reminiscences provide an opportunity to suggest that together, tutor and learner, could write and incorporate them *only* in that participant's literacy process.

The tutor

Lindeman's (1926/1961) view of the tutor-learner relationship fits easily into the Aboriginal notion that learning is a reciprocal event, one that is "mutual, personal, informal. The teacher learns while he teaches . . . [the] teacher will be he who lives with his learners, shares their aspirations and their defeats, and is prepared to learn with them" (pp. 37, 42).

There are tutors who may have experiences and knowledge of Aboriginal cultural values that could aid them in engaging

elderly Aboriginal people in a literacy process. It is a given that tutors must respect an elderly Aboriginal learner; moreover, to be an effective tutor of elderly Aboriginal learners a tutor should have several other qualities; be a good listener; respect confidentiality; have a sense of humour; and be supportive "in ways that build on the learner's skills" (University of Regina, 1996, p. 39) and life experiences.

The tutor, as a guest in an elderly Aboriginal participant's home, must always respect the participant's home environment. Although it may seem unnecessary to point it out, tutors have to be reminded that if they do not personally agree with the elderly participant's housekeeping arrangements they must never comment, either by words, deeds or "facial expressions" (Philips, 1983, p. 5) on the arrangements or conditions of the elderly Aboriginal participant's home.

What more did the participants want?

Literacy in today's world will require "Indigenous Peoples to move outside their communities and . . . will require them to intersect and engage with other ways of knowing, being and doing" (Nakata, 2002, pp. 153-154).

Technology

A computer as a learning technology was readily accepted by the participants. Romeo, for example, was intrigued by the

Aboriginal seniors' centre staff using computers to play games; he thought it must be quite easy to use a computer. Shailey had been given a computer but had no one to make it operational and teach her how to use it.

In the latter stages of this study a modified computer keyboard (Appendix B) was introduced as the means of allowing the participants to use a computer to write. Their ready acceptance of the computer as a writing tool was an indication that there are elderly Aboriginal people who, when given the opportunity, would take to using computer technology in a learning process.

Bringing portable computer technology and literacy processes to the homes of elderly Aboriginal people may be the means for reaching those Aboriginal elderly who, isolated by reason of physical or financial circumstances, might be interested in participating in a literacy process.

The Power Tool

Lindeman (1926/1961) saw the necessity for learning to be "built around the student's needs and interests. . . . [for] those who aim to alter their conduct in relation to a changing environment in which they are conscious of being active agents" (pp. 6, 50).

Literacy, as the power tool Scribner (1986) described, could be viewed as the route that encourages elderly urban Aboriginal

people to take control of, be active agents in, and have an ownership role of a literacy process. A literacy process that could be used as one means to achieve their "personal goals involving language to bring about change, and to feel good about the outcome" (Fagan, 1993, p. 227). Such a participative literacy approach, McClusky might say, could bring elderly Aboriginal people into a social partnership with literacy educators igniting, or re-igniting, a "sense of discovery" (1970a, p. 90) and complementing their "experience and special assets" (1970b, p. 8).

Summary

A literacy approach for elderly Aboriginal people needs to be a learning environment with comfort factors; comfort factors that provide elderly Aboriginal literacy participants with a sense of control in a learning environment.

However, using Highwater's (1981) words, one should look at a literacy process twice "to see all that there is to see" (p. 75). Or, as Dewey (1938) might have asked, "how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them?" (p. 26).

Chapter 6 offers conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Study

The focus of the study was on engaging elderly urban Aboriginal people in a literacy learning process using a phonics based learn-to-read-English approach. Data on the participants' experiences with the learning process were collected through qualitative techniques; participant observation, conversations, and fieldnotes. The analyses and interpretations of the data identified significant elements that contributed to the engagement of the elderly urban Aboriginal people in this study's literacy process.

Summary of Findings

The findings are summarised under the research questions.

1. Of the elderly urban Aboriginal people who participated in this study:

   a. what were their educational backgrounds?

The participants were born at a time and place when education was, for many, not seen as a significant need. The history of schools in Alberta, in the 1930s and the early 1940s, was one of many closed rural schools and teacher shortages (Kach & Mazurek, 1992, pp. 196-197). For the study participants schooling was influenced by their families needs to

earn a living from the land. The basic requirements needed then were physical stamina and a good work ethic.

Three participants gave no indication that their lack of education had been a problem for them in the urban setting. Each had support networks of family and friends who could be called upon when they needed papers to be read or letters to be written. Shailey, of the four participants, was the only one to express regret at not having the opportunity for acquiring more formal education.

b. how was respect for the participants incorporated in this study?

Respect for the anticipated participants began with the use of intermediaries as a first contact. This initial means of approach respected the elderly Aboriginal participants wish to avoid unwanted intrusion into their privacy. Once they had agreed to participate in the literacy process respect for the elderly Aboriginal participants began with the need for the tutor to be sensitive to, and understanding of, their social situations. In a one-on-one learning process it is essential that the tutor establishes a relationship of trust and confidentiality with all the participants.

When an elderly participant is engaged in a literacy process it is incumbent on the tutor to ensure that the pace of learning complements the participants learning rhythms. An Aboriginal participant's prior learning method, work related or self-

learning, may have been through "watching and doing" and then trying to do it in their own time. With this in mind the tutor may need to act less as a teacher and more as a respectful companion guide in a literacy process.

2. What motivated the elderly Aboriginal participants:

   a. who participated in the learn-to-read-English process?

The elderly Aboriginal participants were persuaded by family members or friends to "give learning to read a try;" however, they also had their personal reasons for engaging in the literacy process. Romeo's motivation for engaging in the literacy process was to be able to read about Louis Riel. Shailey and Susie were, each in their own way, self-motivated, however, they found their engagements with mainstream literacy programmes to be personally uncomfortable. Although Angela was initially a reluctant participant as she progressed through the literacy material her interest in learning to read increased.

There were a number of other factors that may have contributed to their decisions to participate in the literacy process coming at a time that, for them, was the convergence of encouraging comfort issues. First, the literacy process catered to their preferences for one-on-one tutoring in a culturally comfortable learning environment removing real, or perceived to be real, barriers to their literacy learning. Secondly, for Shailey and Susie, the option of at-home tutoring provided them with an

environment free of situations where "other" students had asked them too many personal questions. For Romeo it meant there would be no one to "laugh at" him if he made a mistake; while for Angela, who saw herself as being a "slow" learner; learning literacy in her home took away the feeling she was "out of place."

Engaging in a home based literacy process also meant it would be at times that suited their personal schedules, and, in Angela's situation, it overcame her difficulty in accessing suitable public transportation.

b. of those who expressed an interest in this learn-to-read-English process, but did not participate, why did they not participate?

The two elderly Aboriginal persons who were initially persuaded to involve themselves in the literacy process later withdrew. One elderly lady withdrew because, as her friend stated, she was too "shy." There was an indication that gender, a male tutor, may have been one reason she withdrew. The other elderly lady had to withdraw because she was needed to attend to members of her family living in another province. The "time," for those two participants had not been "right."

3. How well, in the views of elderly urban Aboriginal participants, had the following literacy components stimulated their interests:

a. the "visual" component?

The literacy process began with mnemonic images as aids in decoding the sounds of the English letters. It was at this early stage that the participants were asked to assess the relationship of the mnemonic images to the letters and words. This was the first occasion that the participants were provided the opportunity, subtle though it may have appeared, to have an ownership role in the literacy process. The "pictures," some said, helped them to "remember the sounds" of the letters.

Mnemonic images were useful in the first section of the literacy process when the focus was on the sound of the first letter in a mnemonic related word; these words were printed with all black letters. Colour for a vowel letter was used in the summaries of the single words and for dual letter sounds, "th" and so on. Indicating to the learner which vowel was silent in paired vowel words was accomplished by having the vowel letters in contrasting colours (Appendix D).

b. the "experiential" component?

Sacred stories, legends and histories passed down orally by gifted story-tellers from generation to generation have always been a valuable part of past and present elderly Aboriginal peoples experiences (Bloomfield, 1993). There are mainstream literacy programmes for older persons that often include having them write stories of their personal experiences (Schuster, 1999, pp. 231-232).

However, when engaging elderly Aboriginal people in literacy learning and having them include some of their personal experiences as part of a literacy process needs to be given careful consideration. At the beginning of this study the participants were asked if they wanted to have some of their experiences be part of this literacy process. They all said they preferred not to have any of their life stories as part of this study's literacy process. In effect they took some ownership of their own learning, an indication that their interests lay in learning and not in reliving their personal histories.

The short story, "The Owl and the Clown," and the final story, "The Astro-nots" were well received. The participants stated that they would have liked to have more stories because, as Angela found, when words are in stories "they're easier to remember." Romeo and Susie would have liked more stories "about Tom and Jerry," however, the stories had to have satisfactory endings; a reference to the short story "The Owl and Clown."

4. What were the views expressed by the elderly urban Aboriginal participants as related to:

   a. their experiences with this study?

Two unanimous findings were first, their oft stated preference for one-on-one learning. Second, that the sessions be in their homes; "I like it better in my own place," and, "it's more comfortable in my own place." Two participants, Shailey

and Susie, had had experience with mainstream literacy programmes. They clearly indicated that, for them, their personal privacy was an important issue in their abandoning the mainstream literacy programmes.

The focus of the literacy process was on reading. In the later stages of the study, Romeo and Angela had both shown a willingness to try writing using a computer. Romeo had, from seeing the Aboriginal seniors' centre office staff "playing" on a computer, shown an interest in using a computer to write letters to his family. To accommodate their requests I brought the proto-alpha keyboard to the homes of the participants and they did some writing on a computer.

b. their perceived level of reading achievement within the study's prescribed time?

A list of 80 words, selected from the study's literacy material, was presented orally to two of the participants. The review was carried out in the participants' homes several months after the completion of the study's literacy learning sessions.

The words from the list that Susie spelled correctly she attributed to her personal experiences. Romeo's correct, or nearly correct, spelling of some of the words were because he "just knew the word." The follow-up with Shailey was on what value the study had given to her; she said it was "to speak and learn good English, it was better doing it in my place."

What can be inferred from the follow-up sessions with Susie and Romeo was their need to have a longer period of one-on-one tutoring. Neither Susie or Romeo had visits on a regular basis from friends or family members. In semi-isolation situations, as Susie and Romeo experienced, there was little encouragement for them to keep going, on their own, with the learning to read process. In such situations there is a need to provide a longer period of learning for some participants to reach the goal of having them read and learn on their own.

Although Fagan (1991) stated that adult learners rarely achieved "literacy independence . . . by . . . becoming dependent on the program and the instructor . . . learners must become responsible for their own learning as far as possible" (p. 44); the situation for older urban Aboriginal literacy learners is less clear when, for some, their isolation is taken into account.

Conclusions

1. The legacies of Aboriginal learning envelops all Aboriginal learners, no matter what their ages, in a balanced environment that, over their lifetimes, moves them through an integration and internalisation of experiences that gives meaning to, and understanding of, their culture and themselves. In such an environment learning can happen everyday and everywhere, within an extended family and within a community.

An Aboriginal learning environment could be viewed as being what Knowles (1962) called "a totally educative community" in which all members, young and old, are one part tutor and one part learner (p. 279). This relationship between tutor and learner is one that is found in indigenous communities wherein knowledge and experiences are shared in order to keep a community moving forward. However, in the urban context mainstream literacy programmes have not yet addressed the need for an approach that is sensitive to, and culturally appropriate for, elderly Aboriginal people.

2. The elderly Aboriginal participants were aware of mainstream literacy programmes. Two of the participants had attended mainstream literacy programmes and found their experiences to be personally uncomfortable. There appeared to be no literacy programmes, mainstream or Aboriginal, that catered to elderly urban Aboriginal people. Studies that focused on marginal elderly Aboriginal people have, with good reason, centred on their health and financial resources. However, from McClusky's (1970b) perspective there is a need to develop literacy programmes for older persons, and that would include elderly Aboriginal people, that could help them become more effective in their involvement in their communities. What would have to change in order to bring elderly urban Aboriginal people to a culturally appropriate literacy programme?

3. A literacy approach for elderly Aboriginal people must give consideration to their need to have control of their learning in a culturally comfortable environment. A culturally comfortable educative environment would be one in which they controlled the pace of learning ensuring that the literacy learning would not overwhelm them to the point of discouragement.

A comfortable educative environment would, from Bergevin's (1967) perspective, be one in which elderly Aboriginal learners would be given the opportunity to create and adopt goals that have significance for them. In deferring to elderly Aboriginal participants' self-determined expectations, what might encourage the development of an educative environment of shared ownership?

4. If elderly Aboriginal learners were given to understand that they had a shared ownership position in a literacy process it could overcome, for some, their memories of negative educational influences. A literacy approach that placed Aboriginal learners in charge of the pace of learning would be a first step in giving them a sense of shared ownership of a literacy process.

This study's literacy process was based on a shared participation process, within which the elderly Aboriginal

learners determined the time, place, pace and cultural relevance of the process. Giving them a sense of ownership of a literacy process may be an effective beginning, not just a place to start, that could encourage their development and growth of a literacy process for other elderly Aboriginal people. In a shared literacy process a tutor must be sensitive to the needs of the elderly Aboriginal participants.

5. A necessary qualification for tutors of elderly Aboriginal literacy participants is a sense of duty, a caring and sensitive relationship. Tutors must maintain a hold on the belief that all elderly Aboriginal people are capable of learning regardless of age and, that elderly participants have something more they wish to contribute to their Aboriginal communities. Tutors need to follow an Elder's admonition to respect all Aboriginal people, "treat them as your relatives and you will be treated as relatives in turn" (Sioui, 1995, p. 85).

6. When tutors engage elderly Aboriginal people in a literacy process they must respect the elderly participants identity and their relationship to their cultural roots. Respect for the past and present Aboriginal teachings is essential in maintaining their identity and their cultural roots within the urban Aboriginal community.

Moreover, tutors must respect the elderly Aboriginal participant's learning styles, interests and preferred learning environments. A literacy process that incorporates the elderly participant's relationship to their surroundings and to the person that delivers the learning material implies an inclusive and reciprocal agreement between learner and tutor, an agreement that is based on "caring and respect" (Wilson, 1994, p. 314).

7. The challenge for literacy providers is to determine the ingredients that could favour an educative environment for elderly Aboriginal people; one that would combine their experiences with the experience of literacy. Educative processes have been guided primarily by the interests of those who have the power to interpret what they deem to be the path education should follow. An educative environment of shared ownership could, perhaps, answer the question: what, for elderly Aboriginal people in particular, constitutes a literacy process that is sensitive to, and culturally appropriate for, elderly Aboriginal people?

However, with shared ownership comes responsibility; a responsibility that lies, not only with the elderly Aboriginal literacy learners, but with those Aboriginal people who have achieved their educational goals. They should not only be generous in their compassion and respect for their elderly

Aboriginal relations, but also contribute learning time to those elderly Aboriginal people who have expressed a wish to have an opportunity to be involved in an educative community.

Limitations of Application of the Findings

Application of the findings of this study are limited by the number of Aboriginal participants engaged in this study, four. However, the nature of the study, carried out over a period of nine months, indicated that with the encouragement of intermediaries and personal desire, elderly Aboriginal people will engage in a literacy learning process that respects and is sensitive to their ways of knowing.

Suggestions for Further Research

While more and more Aboriginal students are attending higher educational institutions they often turn to their grandparents or Elders for cultural and spiritual sustenance (Gauchupin, Wilson, Lee & Hernandez, 1995). However, very seldom do you hear them say - what can I do for them -? There is a need for a much higher priority in establishing literacy programmes that will meet the literacy needs of elderly Aboriginal people culturally, appropriately and sustainedly.

Literacy programmes for elderly Aboriginal people need to encompass a variety of ways of learning including supporting computer technologies that could be used to reach out to those isolated elderly Aboriginal people who express a desire to

further their education or contribute their experiences in a shared educative environment.

One aspect of the findings indicated that, given the opportunity, elderly Aboriginal people would take to computer technology as a means of learning. Furthermore, computer technology could allow the isolated elderly to have a more active part within their community and in the world outside their community.

Knowles (1991), focusing on the future and on his notion of a totally educative community, visualised adults learning in many different places:

> By far the largest number of adult learners are in their homes, working alone or with two or three neighbors with multimedia packages, computers, television sets, videodiscs, and other equipment that is not familiar to me (I fantasize the equipment to be thought transmitters and receivers - extrasensory perception enhancers). Similar activities are going on in other countries, and it appears that a good deal of communication is taking place between citizens of different nations via interactive television networks. (p. 449)

In an Aboriginal context, teaching and learning has, through observation, experiences, stories and introspective reflection, provided a sense of continuity, a reciprocal relationship with the past, contributing a "virtually limit*less* scope for challenge and accomplishment" (Ross, 1992, p. 92, italics in the original).

Concluding Statement

This study has indicated that, to encourage elderly urban Aboriginal people to participate in a literacy process, several significant learning approaches have to be considered; experience, flexibility, social interactions and peer tutors. A key factor in their participation is for them to understand that they share ownership of the process. A process guided by their needs and wishes, and, wherein they would be treated with respect, never subordinated, disregarded or stigmatised by reason of their culture or gender.

This study was carried out in a manner that, I trust, has respected the elderly urban Aboriginal participants' experiences, knowledge and contributions that they brought to this study.

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Appendix A

Ethics Protocol

Developed for use with illiterate elderly Aboriginal study participants

ETHICS PROTOCOL

(To be read by the researcher. Two copies of this ethics protocol will be signed by the volunteer participants, their witness and the study's principal researcher. One signed copy of this form will be given to the volunteer participant, and one signed copy will be retained by the researcher)

Hello, my name is David Parks. I am the principal researcher on this project entitled:

Literacy for Elderly Urban Natives: A Case Study

Should you have any questions about this research before or during your volunteer participation, I may be contacted at this phone number, **(780) 479-3985**, or you may contact my research co-supervisors, Drs. Peggy and Stan Wilson at **(780) 492-0772** or **(780) 492-0773**.

The **University of Alberta's Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants** is the basis on which this ethics protocol has been fashioned. The complete document may be obtained by accessing:

http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html

This research's ethics protocol has two(2) sections. Section one(1) concerns necessary guiding ethical principles for this research study ensuring that the cardinal principles of modern research ethics of; respect for human dignity, respect for free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for justice and inclusiveness; balancing harms and benefits, minimising harm and maximising benefits to society as a whole and the advancement of knowledge. Section one(1) will be signed prior to participating in this research study.

The purpose of section(2) is to allow a volunteer participant the opportunity to have his/her contribution recognised through inclusion of his/hr name in the acknowledgement(s) page on publication(s) of this research study.

The purpose of the research project is threefold; (1) to teach reading skills to elderly urban Natives who cannot read the English language, (2) that this research, (literacy for elderly urban Natives), is required to fulfil my requirements towards a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Alberta, and, (3) to add to the body of research on literacy for elderly urban Natives.

Thank you for your willingness to volunteer as a participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before we start I would like to explain to you your rights as a volunteer participant in this research project:

(1) your participation is entirely voluntary;

(2) you are free to withdraw from this literacy project at any time;
(3) you are free to refuse to answer any question(s) at any time;
(4) your right to privacy and anonymity is guaranteed;
(5) all volunteer participant's comments and responses will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research project (members are myself and my thesis committee);
(6) excerpts of your comments may be made part of the final research report, however, under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the research report;
(7) transcriptions of any comments attributed to you will be made available to you for any corrections or deletions; and,
(8) data from this research project will be destroyed within five (5) years of its completion;
(9) you will not be deceived at anytime in this project.

Signatures to this ethics protocol part one(1):

I would be grateful if you, **the volunteer participant**, sign this form to show that I have read to you, and fully explained to you, the contents of section one(1) of this ethics protocol.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Print Name)

_____ (Date)

I would be grateful if you, **the volunteer participant's chosen witness** attest that a full and complete explanation of this study has been verbally given to this volunteer participant and that, to the best of your knowledge, the volunteer participant has fully understood his/her rights as a volunteer participant in this study, literacy for elderly urban Natives.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Print Name)

_____ (Date)

Section 2

This section to be signed upon completion of the literacy project.

As **a volunteer participant** in this literacy research project literacy for elderly urban Natives, and, subject to a final review (check one of the following):

_____ I do wish to have my name used in the acknowledgement(s) page of this research study's publication.

_____ I do not wish to have my name used in the acknowledgement(s) page of this research study's publication

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Print Name)

_____ (Date)

I would be grateful if you, **the volunteer participant's chosen witness** attest that a full and complete explanation of this study has been verbally given to this volunteer participant and that, to the best of your knowledge, the volunteer participant has fully understood his/her rights as a volunteer participant in this study, literacy for elderly urban Natives and the significance of having his/her name appear in the acknowledgement(s) page(s) of publication(s) of this study.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Print Name)

_____ (Date)

Appendix B

Proto-Alpha Keyboard

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROTO-ALPHA COMPUTER COMPATIBLE KEYBOARD

This study's focus was on the interactive role of elderly urban Aboriginal people engaged in a literacy learning process. One aspect was to provide the elderly Aboriginal participants with a computer keyboard that was elderly friendly (ELF).

A search of available ELF computer technology was carried out prior to, and during, this study. Two computer technologies were considered; a voice activated computer technology and, a computer keyboard designed for use by those with visual and/or physical problems.

The voice activated computer programme was rejected as it was suitable only for experienced computer users with extensive literacy capabilities.

An ELF computer keyboard was, for this study, viewed as one having large keyboard keys with a maximum of 32 keys capable of reproducing English text material. A review available computer keyboards found there were several large key computer keyboards available. However, the large key computer keyboards would likely present, for an illiterate individual, a visually intimidating array of over one hundred key symbols.

I decided to investigate the possibility of creating a computer keyboard that was ELF. First, I contacted Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's computer science section. I

then arranged to meet with a teaching staff member of the computer engineering section. He stated that it was possible to construct an ELF computer keyboard, however the cost of producing a single keyboard could be expensive. He arranged for me to meet with a local electronics manufacturer. The manufacturer estimated that to design and produce a single ELF keyboard I wanted would indeed be prohibitively expensive.

In search of a less expensive alternative I contacted, and visited, the SaskTel Pioneers at the Pasqua Wire Plant in Regina. This section of the SaskTel Pioneers refurbish donated computer equipment for use in schools and non-profit organisations. They had no knowledge of any computer keyboard that was ELF. However, they did give me several standard format computer keyboards. At about the same time I received a number of standard format computer keyboards from other people who had heard about my search.

It became evident from my keyboard search that if I wanted an ELF keyboard I had to construct it myself. I found that several of the donated computer keyboards had soldered circuitry and individual key unit activators. One such keyboard was deconstructed and its key units were used in the construction of the ELF computer keyboard. The final product was compatible with my HP OmniBook computer and my personal computer.

The ELF keyboard was constructed and mounted in parallel with a standard computer keyboard. Each parallel key unit activator was hard-wired to the standard computer keyboard units equivalent. The ELF keyboard had 32 key units with 45 cm plastic bottle caps for use as key buttons. The letters and symbols were from self-sticking letter sets.

The letters of the alpha keyboard were arranged in three rows in the standard alphabetic order:

the upper row had the - A B C D E F G H I, keys,

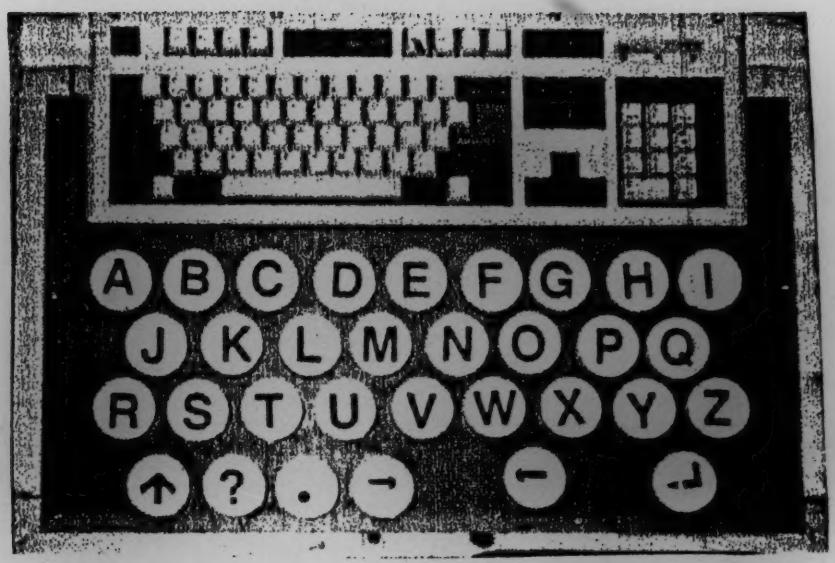
the middle row had the - J K L M N O P Q, keys and,

the bottom row had the - R S T U V W X Y Z keys.

Additional keys were, shift key for printing capital letters, question mark, period, comma, space, back-space and the enter key.

The following photographs are of first, the ELF keyboard as used in this study and, secondly, the ELF keyboard in use by the elderly urban Aboriginal participants

The ELF parallel computer keyboard and its standard computer keyboard companion..



The elderly urban Aboriginal participants using the ELF keyboard.

Appendix C

Phonics Modules

Phonics Modules

Module	Letters single/combination/ word presentations	
1	h, m, p, s, w, t, r	a, 1 summary page
2	j, l, z, r, b, f, d	e, 1 summary page
3	c, k, ck, n, g, v, x	i, o, u, 1 summary page
4	sample words using all vowels	
5	y and y ending as i sound, and sample words and sentences	
6	ch, sh, and sample words and sentences	
7	th, qu, and sample words and sentences	
8	ph, wh, and sample words and sentences	
9	ow, ou, and sample words and sentences	
10	ook,; and sample words and sentences	
11	ink, and sample words and sentences	
12	ank, and sample words and sentences	
13	ing, and sample words and sentences	
14	ing endings, sample words and sentences	
15	all, and sample words and sentences	
16	ight, and sample words and sentences	
17	atch, and sample words and sentences	
18	ar, or, and sample words and sentences	
19	a story: The Owl and the Clown	
20	er, ir, ur, and sample words and sentences	
21	aw, au, oo, ew, and sample words and sentences	
22	oy, oi, and sample words and sentences	
23	ce, ci, cy, and sample words and sentences	
24	vowel "e" effect on other vowels, rat/ rate, hop/ hope, etc.	
25	2 vowels - "ea", eat, reach, clean, etc.	
26	2 vowels - "ie", pie, tried, etc.	

Module	Letters single/combination/ word presentations
27	2 vowels - first sounded, second silent, bat/ boat, got/ goat, etc.
28	vowels "o" & "e", we, be, go, no, etc.
29	y sounds as "i", my, dry, try, etc.
30	vowels "ea" - sound as "e", steal, lead, bead, etc. and vowels "ea" - sound as "eh", stealthy, tread, head, etc.
31	letter "v" and vowels a,e,i,o,u, seven, give, have, live, etc.
32	"ough", 4 sound variations, dough, through, cough, enough
33	silent letters, knife, lamb, walk, hymn, etc.
34	"ear", 4 sound variations, dear, bear, learn, heart.
35	"wor" sound as "w-er", work, word, worry.
36	"wa" sound as "w-au", was, wash, wall, etc.
37	syllables - sounding out words, tablet = tab-let, capsule = cap-sule, examiner = ex-am-in-er, etc.
38	"tion" sounds as "shun", act-tion, cel-e-bra-tion, etc.
39	"able" sounds as "a-bull", t-able, c-able, f-able, etc.
40	"able" sounds as "ah-bull", re-li-able, li-able, etc.
41	"augh" sounds as "aff", l-augh, l-augh-ter, etc.
42	"augh" sounds as "aw", c-augh-t, t-augh-t, d-augh-ter, etc.
43	"ence" sounds as "n-ss", f-ence, sen-t-ence, etc.
44	"ance" sounds as "ants", d-ance, ch-ance, etc.
45	"ist" sounds as "i-ss-t", l-ist, f-ist, s-ist-er, etc
46	"au" sounds as "aw", au-to-mat-ic, au-th-or, etc
47	A story: Tom and Jerry "The Astro-nots".

Appendix D

CD - ROM

- Phonics Workbook - pages 180 to 350
- Ready Reference - pages 351 to 359